

# Saints in Society

R8305980



**Library  
of the  
University of Toronto**

40994

45-

1873-1949

UNWIN  
5 Herts

1906


Canadian issue

1st vol

unwin 1902

1st vol

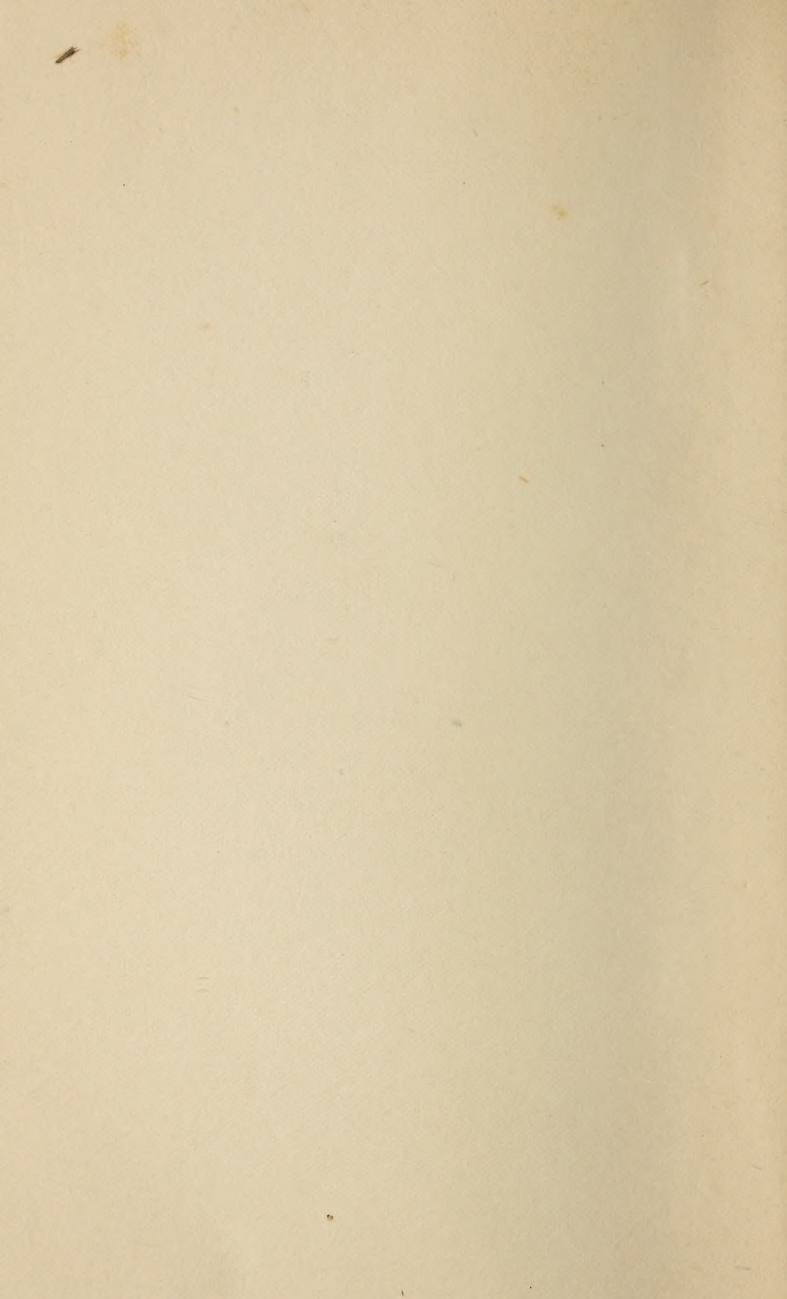




Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2015







# Saints in Society





# SAINTS IN SOCIETY . . .

BY MARGARET  
BAILLIE-SAUNDERS



*SECOND EDITION*  
*NINTH IMPRESSION*

TORONTO  
THE COPP CLARK COMPANY

1906

SAINTS IN  
SOCIETY

BY MARY  
HARRIS





## THE DREAM

THE broad noon blazed athwart the street,  
Adown the vulgar way ;  
I met myself that used to be  
In this unblest to-day.

Pity for those who meet the dead,  
Avenging wrongs of yore ;  
But Christ have pity on him who meets  
Himself that is no more.

His face was as the morning star,  
His eyes were full of light ;  
Singing he went—of holy songs  
That rest not day nor night.

The same old visions of dead things  
Hung round him like a prayer ;  
A pack of dreams was on his back,  
And a halo in his hair.

He wore his rags so well, so well,  
His step was angel-gay ;  
As one whose clouds of glory trail  
About him day by day.

I met him where the four roads meet,  
Hard by the money-mart ;  
He turned and gazed into my eyes,  
And pierced into my heart.

“ So, fool, I know you well,” I said,  
The words fell swift and hot.  
Sternly he spoke : “ So, fool,” he said,  
“ So, fool—I know you not.”

He passed, that self that is no more,  
Adown the drift of years ;  
And left a silence on the street  
And a passion of vain tears.

M. B.-S.



# SAINTS IN SOCIETY

## PART I

### CHAPTER I

HE sat in the corner of a jolting tram trundling its idle way along a lost-looking road in South London.

There was dingy straw on the floor of the vehicle, in which rested the feet of miserable, sulky, steamy occupants, making a hotbed of microbes born of unspeakable ingredients. It was the last tram for the night, and a wan light flickered down on to the row of colourless, sunken faces of the belated travellers; everything was drab, everything was dull, everything was sodden, save one thing—his face. And his face was Dante's, with limitations: having features of a thicker cut, and eyebrows so drawn and level in their black brooding as to suggest Napoleon rather than Dante. It was a wonderful, dark, fiery, disturbing face, and to-night, in this thin December fog in a Walworth tram, it burned with an outward glow of its own which seemed to radiate into a visible rival to the desultory lamp.



For the rest, he was a man of medium build, in a shabby overcoat, whose lumpy outline could not entirely hide a pair of fine shoulders ; clean-shaven, but too pale for full health, and wearing a turned-down collar too dusky to be romantic.

Above the row of passengers' heads opposite was an advertisement in the window pane lauding a powder for the destruction of insects, in which a lurid picture of black beetles in their death-throes was exhibited. Beyond that there was another, offering a remedy for all possible physical ills at a shilling and a halfpenny a jar ; beyond it another, showing by a picture of an extremely pink prize-fighter, with limbs like balloons, how to be strong for ever. A further one showed the uses of a patent food for the development of the coming Hercules ; and yet a further one offered an elixir which, in its own words, cured "everything" with an ambiguity at once daring and sublime.

His eyes, resting lightly on these things, fell again on to the faces and forms below them—skinny, shrivelled, white-lipped, dull-eyed, meagre, stunted—a galaxy to make angels weep.

"Dear God," he said, half aloud, "my poor, poor friends ! To be strong for ever !"

He uttered it as an ejaculation. The bulk of the passengers remained indifferent, but one dim-eyed youth, with a sickly, defiant face and broken boots, looked up at him suspiciously, with the ready resentment of the

Cockney to anything strange. The contempt in his spiritless eyes was intense. His reflections were possibly only, "bloomin' Methody," but he looked the absolutely venomous scorn of the listless for enthusiasm in any form, particularly the enthusiasm of pity. When the man in the corner, his face still aglow with that glorifying preoccupation, whatever it was, got up and swung to the door, holding on by the rail, the defiant Cockney snorted audibly, and watched him drop confidently off the jogging footboard with that smouldering indignation still making more murky his ignoble face, while the gaudy-coloured thing above his doomed, starved, pitiful form continued to tell him, to the reiterated rattle, rattle of the tram, how to be healthy, and strong, and brave, and beautiful, like the wind-braced gods of Hellas.

The cause of this passing hate, named plainly Mark Hading, walked along rapidly and turned into a mesh of mean streets; row upon row of small drab houses, all alike, stretching away into interminable distance. Into one of these, in a street called Minden Street, he presently let himself with a latch-key, carefully wiping his feet on a shabby mat, and stepping softly upstairs to a room at the back of the tiny house. A light streamed from the half-open door, and he went in, calling "Flower" in a calmly cheery voice. A girl turned round at his entrance.

"How late you are!" she said pettishly. She was busy trying on a brittle pearl necklace

on to a not too snowy neck, and was twisting before a mean parlour mantel mirror to do so, pursing up her mouth and enlarging her eyes to get a good effect.

His face fell just a little, but he spoke kindly

“Ah, but, little Flower, it was such a meeting! Never have we had such a meeting! The room was packed. The thing was wonderful. And I have made a friend. But is there anything for me to eat? I have spoken for two whole hours—never, never before as I spoke to-night. And I am tired, child, and hungry.”

The girl threw down her necklace with an impatient jerk. All her ways were jerky. She was a tall girl—very tall for her extreme slinness, with the typical beauty of the London girl of the lower classes. She had even but puffy features; deep-set, discontented eyes of greeny grey, with good lashes and brows; a thick, sulky-looking mouth. Her complexion was muddy and dull, and her hair, which Heaven had intended to be fair brown, was drab through ill washing, and had no gloss on its really thick and massive waves. It was, indeed, rolled heavily round a lumpy pad, which showed here and there in an “aureole” form that Walworth working girls had made a mode. The “points” she could give were so bad that one’s first impression upon seeing her was to wonder that she could give an idea of good looks at all; yet she did, in the mysterious fashion that hundreds



of white-faced Cockney girls give it. It may be due to the carriage of the head on the long column-like neck ; the easy walk learnt by the School Board drill ; the good, proportionate outlines, that make up for the utter drabness of the colouring ; also, in some degree, the mystery imparted by that settled sulky stare which she fondly calls " hauteur," and which gives her an air of aloofness — sometimes distinction — interesting, though hardly attractive. There was also something to be said for the really wonderful knack of suiting herself in even the shabbiest of clothes that every lower-class London woman seems to have in such perfection. This girl, Chloris Hading, the wife of the man before her, wore a blouse, bought ready-made at a cheap shop, and mean enough in its skimpy proportions to cling to the figure like a jersey. It was a dingy edition of what was once pale green, and had some draggly lace about it ; yet she had put it on well, and it " set " with some hint of an air. Her shabby skirt, of the poorest stuff, fitted mysteriously well on the hips, but wanted mending badly at the edge. She lifted it with an American " crook " of her elbow — it was long — as she stepped across the room to a cupboard and took out several small dishes and plates and a shabby tablecloth, which she proceeded to set crooked over only a quarter of the table in front of her husband. She did this wifely duty grudgingly, with apparent scorn. Certainly the old black-handled knives and forks, the slab of cold meat,

the doubtful water-jug, were not calculated to raise one's spirits.

While the weary husband ate this comfortless meal she sat looking moodily into the fire. The hearth needed brushing up, it was choked with cinders, and the rest of the little table not occupied by the mean supper was covered with ends of some rough sewing that she had evidently been doing—something fine and cheap—for her own adornment. These things did not appear to strike her at all. She had almost the same look on her face as the defiant young man in the tram, and it spoilt her beauty. Mark's face still bore the glory of his dream.

"The hall was packed with men," he said as if thinking aloud. "They never listened before as they did to-night, Clo. I believe I could lead them to anything; I say it without selfishness. I hope it is not myself I care about, but those poor fellows—those tired faces, those weary lives, those noble souls imprisoned, undreamt of, lying lost like rubbish in a lumber-room under the fearful effort of daily bread-getting and the struggle to live. Christ can be brought to these, but not by mere sentiment. We must get the great leaders and law-makers of the land to join hands with us if we are to help them. We must fight against the cause of selfish wealth, and that I am going to do, that I mean to do. Francis of Assisi did that. He taught the rich and the great to love the poor. He overcame the most fearful social conditions—ay, and political—that ever a man

had to fight. And how did he do it? By love. What is wanted now is love. We must love these creatures with all our heart and soul and strength. That is the only way—the only way.”

He paused. Clo gave a short laugh, mean and mirthless.

“You talk like Mrs Deane,” she said contemptuously. “That’s what she’s always saying.”

“Dorcas Deane is a blessed woman,” he answered solemnly. Then his eyes fell upon the drooping girl, for the first time, perhaps, seeingly. Saints in trances are often obtuse.

“You’re tired, Flower,” he said kindly. “Have you been very dull? I’m afraid you have.”

“Oh! Mrs Deane came up and jawed me,” she said rudely, “about the Bible and things. And I’ve been out looking at the shops. There’s a good play coming on at the Rareity—lovely big posters I saw. Fine! It was called ‘The Wild Worst Woman.’” Her voice suddenly grew eager. “Nesta Nilley’s going to be there, and Georgie Hicks, and all that lot. Couldn’t I go, Mark, just for once?”

Mark’s face clouded. He spoke very sadly.

“I’ve said ‘No’ to you so often,” he said after a pause, “I suppose I must say ‘Yes’ this once, if your heart is set on it, Flower. But, child, it can do you no good, and infinite miserable harm. Who will go with you? Mrs Tombs, I suppose. I can’t let you go without her.”

The girl's face softened a little, but she was too London-bred to be gracious. Cities kill grace.

"All right," she said laconically, though in reality she felt distinctly grateful. Then she held the necklace of glassy pearls with the diamond clasp out to the light of the one lamp, in a rapture of contemplation.

"Ten—three," she said ecstatically.

To this sibyllic utterance no answer was vouchsafed. Perhaps it required none. Mark sighed, but took out his pipe, which he lighted, and came and sat by the girl. The mystic figures "Ten—three" still hung potent in the silence they had created, but they had not the effect of drawing the man's eyes to the bauble. He was looking with his strong, direct gaze into the fire, lost in thought.

Clo put aside her unappreciated bargain with a pout—that pout that was making her face almost repulsive. She had learnt it quite early at the Board School, where it was considered good form, and had been confirmed in it by reading penny novels, wherein the heroine always tantalised the hero with her "adorable pout" in a manner so truly life-like. Men, in real life, have such a singular admiration for sulks!

"I suppose you think I ought to go about with you more," she said suddenly; "Mrs Deane says I ought. Guess it's dull enough at those meetings of yours, half about Parliament and half about God. You're always at them.



'Tain't lively for me. But—but, I'll go to-morrow if you like." This was a concession.

"Oh! dearie," he answered warmly, "you will come? Of course you shall. Why, I haven't had a chance to tell you, but to-morrow will be the biggest day of my life. I fully believe it will be my great chance. To-night at Shoreditch Sir Samuel Crawshay—our member, you know—was present to hear me—he came over in his motor on purpose. But better still, Stillingfleet was there—you know, Lord Henry Wade's man of business, secretary, what not; he was sent specially, and he was so enthusiastic I could hardly get away from him: they were all the same. And Stillingfleet says that Lord Henry Wade is coming to-morrow to hear me at Islington, and to speak to me, and all sorts of possibilities open up for my great work. At last, at last something will be done for my poor brothers and sisters."

He talked on for another hour. Clo sat listening and watching him with a fascinated gaze that turned her greyish eyes into the green glow of an aquamarine, all the dulness gone from her face.

"La," she said breathlessly, "I'll come right enough. *Rather*—if there's Dukes to look at!"

## CHAPTER II

LORD LISTOWER sat at dinner in a mass of orange lights, and silver, and blue flowers, contemplated by sections of his ancestors looming out of the dusk that wrapped all of the immense church-like room save the pool of brilliance round the table. Lord Listower was tall and emaciated, with a pale grey imperial and a straight, trimly-pointed moustache, curly silver hair parted in the middle, high cheek bones, a deeply sallow complexion, and the very bluest of blue eyes containing an expression of great foolishness. Nevertheless, he had filled in his day some of the severest of diplomatic posts with distinct honour. His foolishness of look was, too, really charming. It disarmed you at once.

"Henry's found a man," he said smilingly addressing his wife across the banks of flowers. He was always smiling in that inscrutable, watery way.

"Who?" said her ladyship, truculently. She was a long-nosed woman, with a very round face and very small mouth, and had a blue-black wig much too heavy for her, like Queen Anne's. She wore big earrings and many really beautiful jewels of antique pattern, but her dress, which

was always elaborate, had got only to the 'Eighties and had there stopped, apparently. She had a penchant for black Spanish lace guipure over bright blotting-paper pink, of which her costume was to-night composed, and she had preserved, though in a matronly fashion, the "hour-glass" outline of the ideal figure of the 'Eighties, together with its high shoulders and bust, its tight sleeves, and its basqued bodices. Her features were plain, her expression forbidding, nevertheless she looked to the full the Marchioness of Listower she was, by some mysterious logical process by which birth and truth (and murder) "will out." She had not been Lady Adeliza Theresa Tilney Rochmane for nothing, and the daughter of a Duke, and a line of such.

"Quite a real man this time," continued Lord Listower. "Ask Henry himself, he will tell you. Savonarola, I believe, with a touch of John Burns, and just a flavour of Sacheverell, Napoleon, Garibaldi and Charles Wesley. Quite explosive."

"It sounds horribly tiresome," said Lady Listower, crossly. "I hope he won't come here."

"No fear, mother, for the present," laughed the great Henry.

"You are a dear boy, and an angel," said she, irrelevantly and gushingly, "but you have found so many tiresome men so often before that you must forgive your old mammie for being suspicious."

She said this with a saccharine ogling quite embarrassing, one would think, to Henry. But that worthy looked undisturbed. His high shoulders fell not, his triangular mouth remained impassive. "I'll keep him where he lives for the present," he said, "don't fear."

"Where's that?" said a wee high voice from over the other side of the blue hedge of flowers.

"Walworth," said Henry, "a place over a river, with no houses, where it is always night."

"No houses. How funny!" said the piping voice. "Does he live in the sand?"

"In the mud," replied Henry with his father's smile and chronic shrug. "I think there's a hut. The scenery is warehouses and huts, varied by tram lines. There are groves of undertakers' shops interspersed by rich clumps of public-houses: and furniture shops where all the furniture is bamboo. There are stalls where they sell shell-fish and rabbit-skins. I don't know why."

"It sounds so Red Indian," said Lord Listower; "shall we add Hiawatha to the list of possibilities?"

"Yes; but we shall have to give him the blanket," answered Henry, a little ruefully; "they haven't enough of those down there."

Lord Henry Vade, a thin man of unguessable age, extending from a possible thirty to fifty, had the Listower smile in all its supreme and graceful foolishness. On his thin, high-cheek-

boned face, and even, sharp features, with his set china blue eyes and pink-and-white waxen complexion, it had an almost sinister effect. He looked like the wax figures of ancient sovereigns at Westminster Abbey, with their awful eternal simper and utter stillness. He had long thin pale hands that looked dead—it sounds horrible and it looked so: and he might have sat for the villain in a mediæval piece, except that he was rather fair, which of course, in a melodramatic sense, exonerated him—in spite of the gorgeous precedents of Phillip II. of Spain, Uriah Heep, and Judas.

If his father's grin made him look like Richelieu, Henry's made him look like Iago. Yet he was, as a matter of fact, the Saint of the family: by far the best man in it, which is another thing altogether. So does Nature play us tricks.

Opposite to him sat his sister Veronica, his feminine counterpart at twenty-seven years of age, save for greater piquancy and less picturesque villainy of face. There were those who compared her to the portraits of Emma, Lady Hamilton, but she was much thinner and much colder, and her smile was a chronic and determined simper; not, as in her prototype, the ebullition of eternal, deathless youth. The colour on her high cheeks was too high, and her eyes were a deeper blue and her lashes darker than Henry's. To-night she wore peach colour and exquisite pearl and emerald ornaments set in heavy silver. Her artificially-



reddened hair was dressed *à la* Kauffmann, rolled back in a wave from her eager face.

The other two members of the family now at home were the two younger brothers, Pegram and Bunny, Pegram being the owner of the piping voice. He was little and fat, and quite different to the Listowers; he had his mother's rounder face and dark frizzy hair parted in the middle, but the Listower smile in his quite absurdly goggle, protruding eyes. He had the voice of a child, the habits of a groom, and what ideas and opinions none had ever discovered.

Bunny was faded and grey and thin, with heavy eyelids and the air of having been up all night all his life, and by never having gone to sleep at night never having been really awake by day. He had the Listower thinness but the Rochmane lumpiness of outline, which gave his head, as well as all his features individually, the appearance of a series of door handles. For instance, he had a round head but a thin neck; a round end to a thin-bridged nose; a knobbly chin to a tiny, haggard face. He was very pale, and very light, and very old, and, like Pegram, clean-shaven. Yet he was only twenty-two and the youngest of the family. He turned to Henry now.

"What is his name?" he said.

"Mark Hading," answered the unmoved one. "You know the dream of my life is to found a Labour Candidate: endow it, give it a seat in Parliament: buy it a newspaper: rouse

its temper : and see how it works. I am a social reformer."

"Let *me* rouse its temper," piped Pegram from his blue arbour.

"You?" said Veronica, speaking for the first time. "You idiot, nobody could ever get angry with you."

Her words lost their sting by the accompaniment of the simper which enwreathed them. Then she turned to her elder brother.

"Has he a beard?" she said dreamily.

"No," replied he, "not at all. He is clean-shaven. His face is ripping. He's a splendid-looking creature."

"I thought Labour Candidates always had beards. That's really why I always hated them. But in this case—shall I assist you? I'll come with you and look him over if you like—didn't you say you go to hear him to-night?"

"Vera!" said her mother, pettishly, "you can never turn out to-night to examine a man in rabbit-skins. It would be most dangerous : you would catch cold."

"I've got my motor brougham here," said Henry, "she'll be all right. Come along, Vedi, and see the monster for yourself. Dear mamma, you will let her?"

When Henry said "dear mamma" he got his way. His mother adored him, so much so that indeed she had never forgiven her eldest son, Lord Creek, for occupying that seniority of post. Even now she revenged herself by keeping his wife in mortal fear of her letters

and sending her mean Christmas presents from the Stores. But Henry, the second son, was her soul, her idol: while Vera, Pegram and Bunny were pieces of dull but necessary and respectable furniture.

Vera's interest, once roused, was spasmodically keen. Time was getting on, she said—would her father excuse her and let her go and put on a warm cloak? She never addressed her mother if she could avoid doing so.

"Yes, yes," said Lord Listower, "yes, put on some sables and warm things. Don't—don't catch a chill. Poor D'Auvernay—you know the man?—of the Foreign Office got a chill attending six peers' funerals in a fortnight, quite the other day. They were Irish peers, weren't they, Henry? I forget. But anyhow he died. You mustn't do that, dearest."

"I should have thought peers' funerals would have been warm things—Irish peers'," said Pegram, weakly, from the blue cosy corner. There was no laugh to follow this jest, but Bunny snarled and took a liqueur.

Vera was not long over her sables and came down just as Henry was ready to go and looking impatiently at his watch.

When they were fairly started and found themselves spinning away through miles of unknown streets bright with light and traffic, Vera turned to him.

"Are you really going to run this man?" she said with genuine curiosity in her wide-apart, hard eyes.

"I am if he is all Stillingfleet says he is," he answered.

"Then you haven't seen him?—it is only on the word of Stillingfleet?"

"Yes, and Crawshay."

"Oh! he too? But Stillingfleet knows better what he is talking about. Poor Sam Crawshay is so Arcadian: everyone to him is perfect except his own relations. He loves all the world."

"While Stillingfleet?"—he began meaningly.

"Secretaries cannot love," answered she, laconically. But there came a mocking, ruminative look into her eyes as if she had had some half-amusing ulterior thought. Her brother laughed.

"He has a wife, Vedi," he said.

"That proves nothing," answered she: and after a pause, "And has he? I never thought about such people's private affairs. Do they have them? I suppose they do."

"She's not such a private affair either," he answered; "she often goes about to see him perform when he is in my train. She may be there to-night. Shouldn't wonder. She's by way of being political for what she can get. She'd go to a Borough Council drain-pipe squabble if she could see a baronet's boots for half a minute."

Vedi merely shrugged contemptuously under her furs. But when the motor drew up at the door of the Islington Hall and a tall man with

a military moustache and very fine feminine-looking eyes came running out to bow them in, she put out her hand and said, "Ah, Mr Stillingfleet, I am come to approve your choice," with a glance so lingering and full of meaning that the secretary felt a little giddy and led her into the lighted hall without clearly seeing where he was going.



### CHAPTER III

ON the morning of the Islington meeting Clo Hading had pinned a big hat, with feathers so completely out of curl as to resemble herring bones, somewhat viciously on to her head in her usual jerky fashion, and had gone down the street and knocked loudly at the door of a neighbouring house, a little drab dwelling exactly like her own, save that it was kept in tidier condition. The minute patch of earth between the railings and the house called "the front garden" was in better order; in the summer it was quite gay with white Alison and lanky marigolds, but just now it savoured of winter and even sported some orange peel in its border. There was a brass plate, too, on the door, in excellent order, saying on it, "Mrs Tombs." Not that this lady had any profession or kept any institution requiring such a statement of her name to the public: but the late Mr Tombs had been a small builder, very small indeed, but a "master man," and on the strength of this social elevation Mrs Tombs adhered to the custom of using a brass plate for her own name when her husband's death made the use of his plate a mockery. To the widow's mind her glory would indeed have departed had

she allowed the brass plate institution to lapse : brass plates they had always had. So she had one made for herself. She was accustomed to say, in disparagement of the socially inferior, "My dear, they are not brass-plate people."

In addition to this distinction she had, of course, gained by her husband's death the glorious right to wear widow's "weeds," a privilege valued indeed in her particular world. And though she would never have admitted it, she really loved the vast crêpe attire with the heavy bonnet of rather rusty black that this state enjoined ; and above all the long black wagg-ing earrings with a lugubrious design of hands holding broken torches worked out in jet.

Her visitor announced, she toddled briskly into her "parlour" and kissed Mrs Hading joyfully. As it was the morning she was not in her full mourning regalia, but wore a short black skirt pinned up with black safety pins in loops all round her round form, a black and white check cotton morning jacket ; and though not the jet earrings, a pair of inferior significance as symbols but even superior as curiosities—namely, composed of hair—dark brown hair—and filigree. These ghastly adornments, with an oval brooch to match, were her usual wear for "off" occasions. They really signified "off-ness." Mrs Tombs was a little, round, red-faced woman with jet black locks of her own, so that the question as to whose dark brown scalp she carried about with her in this gruesome manner had often been on Chloris's lips, but she had not

quite dared to put it. Lord Listower would have felt the Red Indian element to have been doubled could he have seen these barbaric gewgaws.

Chloris gave her invitation—Would she come with her to hear her husband speak at Islington?

“Delighted, dear,” said the little widow, who loved an outing less for its own sake than for the full display of the jet earrings.

“Because,” said Clo, “Mark doesn’t like me going alone. He says there’ll be a lot of men, some of them rough, and I ought to sit right near the front and have a lady with me. Besides, there’s to be some Dukes there.”

She laughed and nodded. Mrs Tombs’s earrings waved in a wild tumult as she nodded with her in huge delight. “Dear, dear—how lovely,” she said; “we shall be grand. It will be like the old days to me. Just like the old days.”

When the evening arrived the young wife of the speaker came very early to the Islington Hall, and, accompanied by her friend the widow, in full regalia, was placed in a front seat to the left of the hall.

As she sat and gazed round at the now rapidly-filling and cheerfully-lighted place, a sense of pride of some sort began to stir in her vulgar little mind. The gallery was already packed and the other seats were being filled with a steady influx of men, all looking earnest and ready for some occasion of extra

interest. The girl began to feel a thrill of something like excitement. Could Mark do this? Had he brought all these men together? This immense and growing crowd—was it collecting to hear Mark? If so he wasn't so dull then after all. Even Georgie Hicks, the joy of the Walworth pantomime, who dressed up as a tipsy frog and stood on his head, could do no more. She felt a little real pride in her husband for the first time. It had never occurred to her before. And she too—she was put in a front seat and made much of as his wife. This, also, was a new idea. She began to feel the dawning sense of power, to feel herself to be somebody of importance, and the rush of reflections that came to her made her sit very still and keep very silent.

She was looking a little better to-night, for the simple reason that she had not regarded the occasion as one upon which to make herself "a swell" as she called it. The result of this was that her shabby black coat and skirt were at least neat, and her hat, no longer decorated by herring bones, was of a kind happily incapable of coming out of curl at all, and infinitely more becoming in consequence. Round her neck was the string of pearls about which had been uttered the sibyllic announcement, "Ten—three"—her one concession to the "Dukes." Yet who can probe the evolutions of a woman's mind?—for here a strange thing happened.



After one more long look round the now packed hall, and one pause of thoughtful uncertainty, she put up her hands and quietly unclasped the necklace and slipped it noiselessly into her pocket. After this she sat very still with a wave of warm colour suffusing her face and the long column-like neck, and beat her foot quickly upon the ground in front of her almost with an air of abashed impatience. Mrs Tombs, busy studying the sea of faces swelling around her, did not see the action, neither did the audience observe the small shy drama of three seconds that had taken place in their very midst.

This incident, whatever it betokened, passed by without explanation—the girl herself would have been the last to explain it—and the murmur of excited expectation around her grew in volume. The buzz of talk and the shuffle of countless feet inspired her and gave her quite a sense of exultation, and with it a flush. Secretly she did not believe that the Dukes would prove particularly interesting anyhow, and ungratefully called her friend “a silly old thing” on that head in her own mind. But she did think there might be uniforms, such as the soldiers wore on Jubilee Day. Above the bare platform the high walls, painted green, stretched up into space with great glass globes occurring at intervals, and on it there was a table, a glass of water, and several extremely hard-looking chairs. Arid enough, but to her now fraught with great issues.



When the hall was quite full, and at last the baize doors opened and the chairman, a local celebrity with a bald head, a watch chain, and the smile of a far stage of hysteria, came in with her husband and the "Dukes," she had no eyes for them at all, for at that identical moment Stillingfleet was leading Veronica into the middle of the hall and placing her in the first seat to the right hand, opposite Chloris and Mrs Tombs.

It was the very first of such visions that Clo had ever seen, and with open mouth she sat at gaze. The chairman was introduced sheepishly: spoke himself more sheepishly, and introduced Mark Hading, who wasn't at all sheepish. Things were said, formalities accorded, and Mark began to speak. Clo heard his voice, but not his words. He was forgotten.

Veronica sat leaning back, her furs half off, looking like a bit of lightning that had suddenly strayed into a mud heap by mistake. All around her were serried ranks of dusky faces and duskier clothes: white, awful, hopeless faces, of the unemployed, the drunken, the weary, the stupid. They were mostly men, and they all had the look of set purpose that grows on a face whose sole doom is blind misery. There was not a smile as Mark began. They even looked at him grimly, as if incapable of expecting too much, after such years of hope deferred.

Against such a background Vera's clear-cut

cold simper shone with a startling radiance. Her white neck gleamed with the emeralds and pearls set in old silver that she wore at dinner, and the peach colour of her dress caught the light and looked like flame against the dark sables heaped round her. She wore large jewels in her ears, and her sweep of red-brown hair rolled back from her face, in imitation of Emma Hamilton as "*Bacchante*," added to her singularity of appearance.

She was watching Mark intently, but the habitual mockery of her expression gave her no softening grace; and her already high enough colour heightened by a touch of rouge, in this bald glare of gaslights shaded only by wire frames, added to her appearance of utter unreality. Sometimes her high-bred indifference to her kind led her into absolute bad taste. It had done so to-night. Selfishness persisted in often reaches exactly the same goal as pure ill-breeding. No vulgar chorus-girl, hardened to strangers' coarse comment, could have displayed her shoulders and gems with worse effect than did this vain woman in the presence of fourteen hundred tragic, starvation-haunted men.

But to Clo she was perfect beauty, the perfect model. For half an hour she hardly saw a single other face. When at last she did look away she found her husband's voice was raised and that a change had come over the faces of his audience. Eager now, they were straining to listen to his words, which were pouring out in a fiery flood, hardly as though it was he

that spoke, but some immortal voice within him. He was practical enough in all conscience. His illustrations were homely, and his word pictures almost inspired in their simplicity: they understood him to a man: one could see that. But he had more to offer than sympathy. He gave daring suggestions, yet things not without reason: he tackled the questions of health, of bread-winning, of home-keeping, of alien immigration and its results—and its remedy: he spoke of education, of housing, of city-making, of the rearing of citizens, of the curse of monopoly. He was by turns humorous, inspiring, pathetic, declamatory, indignant—once furious: that was when he came to monopoly and the “accursed rich,” who grind the face of the poor. Then suddenly he turned to religion, and spoke of it calmly and critically, first as we see it to-day, then as it should be. He talked of all the churches, one after the other, and gave them a brilliant review, not without some stings, but by no means in the howling demagogue spirit, rather with a large gentleness. Then he spoke of Christ quite naturally, as one would speak of someone present. He did not appear to feel the characteristic English embarrassment at the mention of that mighty Name, and, as is only natural, neither in turn did his audience. It was a gospel of hope. It was capable of inspiring even the hungry, and that means more than eloquence, it means the giving of the heart. Mark gave his heart that night and won the people’s entirely.

When he sat down there was a huge thunder of applause that seemed as though it would never cease. Clo stopped her ears once, it absolutely frightened her. Her heart was beating fast. She saw her husband in a new light. He seemed transfigured, and the beauty of his stern features in the warmth of that radiance struck her as something she had never really noticed before. She, like the people, was immensely moved. She felt proud to be his wife, yet conscious for the first time that she had been a discontented, slovenly wife to him, as indeed she had. She felt a new sense of possibilities opening to her, as though the world had grown suddenly larger.

Even the "Dukes" were taken aback. She saw Lord Henry leaning forward gazing straight at Mark's passionate face towards the end of the speech, a look in which the Listower smile for once was not. She saw the rather stolid, ruddy, clean-shaven countenance of Sir Samuel Crawshay watching him intently without a movement, an attitude far more complimentary than applause; and, when it was all over, all these men conferring eagerly together, while the chairman said bland nothings to space, and men in the gallery shouted questions and suggestions in hoarse, rough voices.

Then others spoke, among them Vade. But Vade was in full evening dress and was received less kindly. There were sundry grumblings and mutterings during the whole of his speech.



So does the ignorant mind rely on the obvious, to its own misleading. For Lord Henry alone in the room that night had the power, means and definitely-formed intention to do anything real for these hundreds of miserable men: he alone held the purse-strings, the influence, the knowledge for that end. Yet he was hissed for his shirt front and his inherited smile. You have to do private theatricals to the British public to get its ear. Hading, in an old common overcoat, a hideous tie and dull boots, represented the "working man" in spite of his Dante face; Hading was rough and blunt and hot-worded and shabby. The fact that he was known to be a printer was of less importance. Had he dressed like Lord Henry he would have had little more, if any more, chance. While Lord Henry in Hading's clothes, robbed of that ancestral smirk, would have claimed some sincere respect.

During the evening Stillingfleet came down from the platform and talked to Veronica in whispers, and a woman beyond, half hidden by a tall screen, who had been up to this employed in watching her opportunity, now came up and joined them. This was Stillingfleet's wife, a short, "pepper-and-salt" coloured woman of dumpy figure, with a square-looking toque and a general appearance of spotted veil, fringe-netted hair, mediocrity of skirt and blatantly good boots, which can only be described as "lady-like." She looked middle-aged against Stillingfleet, who was rather a



dandy type naturally, a trait heightened by his having as his secret model the wax dummies in tailors' windows. He presented her to Lady Veronica Vade, who managed to give her as near a cut as a bow can be, so that even she with her love of the great felt the lash. Apparently unmoved she drifted over to Chloris, and forcing herself into a seat at her side introduced herself, and began a patronising comment on Mark's success.

Clo was enough of a London girl to feel and resent the patronage. She retired into one of her sulkiest expressions. But Mrs Stillingfleet proceeded doggedly, in her thin, nasal voice,—

"That remark of your husband's was quite the thing about monopoly," she said. "I understand these things, you see: I've known all about them for years—of course, naturally I do, my husband being in the advantageous position he is."

Clo assented coldly.

"Of course his position is particularly good, you see," she said. "He is permitted to the friendship of all the family, and made much of in every way."

"I see he is," said the girl, watching Vera's coquettish dallyings with scornful interest.

"Oh, you only see part of what goes on every day of our lives," persisted the dreary snob in her mean voice, eager to tell yet trying to convey her information in an airy manner, as though peers were her daily companions. "Mr Stillingfleet has extraordinary influence

in that set. He can help your husband ever so, if he likes."

"Oh, I don't think Mark needs it," said Clo, coldly, "he's clever enough."

"That may be," said the snob, "but in this world influence—influence is more than brains. Much more. Your husband will find he must get influence if he's to rise."

But Clo's attention had gone elsewhere.

During Lord Henry's speech the murmurs of discontent from every side had grown from a low, long-drawn rumble to a swelling wave of sound, and upon the rapidly-whispered advice of Stillingfleet, now back on the platform, and the rather timorous chairman, he ceased suddenly, and met a roar of abuse—vague rudeness and silly personalities enough, but not pleasant in the face of the overwhelming numbers of the attacking party. People in the front, the more respectable members of the community, hurriedly got up and swayed about uncertainly, and some chairs fell, creating a sense of disturbance. The chairman was waving his hands and visibly speaking if you watched his mouth, but not a word could be heard, though the din was half of it a kind of grim fun and only half really bitter.

A haggard, lowering-looking fellow to the right, who had made one or two illogical objections during the course of Mark's speech, in a determinedly insolent voice, now got up and worked his way over to where Veronica was standing, bewildered by the suddenness of

the change. Leaning close to her face he spumed forth a horrible insult on her appearance, her evening attire, her manner. The words, some of them so bad as to convey no meaning to her, were accompanied by gestures too clear to escape interpretation. Gasping in real terror she shrank back, to find a tall, shabby girl of the working class, or almost that, pushing in front of her almost rudely, and clutching at her dress with one hand whilst she faced the bully.

"Call yourself a man, do you?" she absolutely shouted, her eyes flaming like green stars. "Go along with you! You cad—insulting a lady."

"Lady, is she?" he sneered. "She's a—"

"She's my friend. You be quiet, Jim Balls. I know you. Thought you was a gentleman. Bah!"

"Didn't know Mark Hading's wife had friends like *that*. Knew she wasn't no angel, a dressy, play-going little minx. But—"

He was going to say more but Clo, without more ado, suddenly stepped forward, seized his thin sloping shoulders in her two large firm hands and gave him a violent push from behind with all her might, sending him whirling and stumbling among the crowd in sheer surprise; then clutching Vera's sables she dragged them roughly over her bare neck and jewels and clasped them, and half pulled, half pushed her to the door, before either of them realised that the din was quieting and Mark

was speaking angrily and commanding silence and getting it.

At this juncture Vade joined his sister and the motor spun away from the excited spectators. Then Veronica said,—

“Who was that girl—do you know?”

“That? That was Hading’s wife.”

“Hading’s wife? That little slum person? What a drag she will be on his career—if he ever has one,” she said, pursing her lips. “Geniuses—he is a sort of genius, I suppose?—always marry awful wives.”

## CHAPTER IV

LORD HENRY VADE was of that school of social reformers who, had they happened to have been born in, say, Italy, in the seventeenth century, would have been counted unspeakable villains by the right-minded, and would to-day have ranked with the Borgias and the Medici as something too unutterably cunning and fascinatingly wicked to regard more seriously than as the lurid centre of a well-staged play with a famous actor whose "R's" roll like the thunder of drums to represent him. But happening to be born in Little Chudleigh Street, Park Lane, in or about 1865, things were different; and his undying tendency to regard all political work as something like bridge, only more dangerous, which you played with human cards, or chess pawns, keeping yourself and your own personality rather in the background, was considered by his friends to be highly respectable (as indeed it was) if a little foolish: the game, indeed, hardly worth the candle. That, of course, is as you take it. But his enemies did not call it Borgian or anything so picturesque; they did not even concede that it had the semi-picturesqueness of being not respectable—that is to say, they did not credit him with a turned-



down collar, and earnest views, and noble aims, and side whiskers. They simply said in a deprecating manner that it was "playing down rather low" and was not quite square. And one, a modern Radical of the newest school, said it "wasn't quite gentlemanly."

But Vade was more serious than he looked, and in the heat and interest of the things he set himself to do was quite deaf to comments. His mobile, urbane face was so alive with sensibility that it was all the more annoying that he never seemed even to hear rude remarks: he looked so beautifully easy to snub, and somehow, when you tried, he wasn't. Somehow, like chickens, the ill-bred "dig" came home to roost, and the rash innuendo shot at him hung about in the air instead of hitting him and had a way of eventually tardily travelling home again with the truly stupid look of things returned on "His Majesty's service." So his enemies tried to forget him. And when, a few years ago, he had resigned his seat as Radical member for a division of Lambeth, and went for a tour round Africa, they really began to hope they could. When, a little later, he wrote a rather weak book—an *édition de luxe* on antique knockers—they finally decided the point and forgot him. Only the *Times* remembered him, and even it raked him up mainly to adorn accounts of social functions, to which he always went late, smiling sadly.

But he was not so idle as the last five years of his career would seem to represent. It does

not take you all your time to pose as Beau Nash and consider yourself eighteenth century ; in fact, you may do that well, and have your chambers decorated in perfect imitation of the Hogarthian era, and walk mincingly, and wear jade scarf-pins and carry a clouded cane, and yet have much time on your hands for other things. And this man was, while collecting curios, hunting for a Labour candidate of spotless integrity. He was working out plans for the raising of the very dirtiest and most discontented of "working men" into something useful, self-controlled, honourable and empire-making. It was only the quaint evolution of party terms within the last decade that had made him resign the Radical constituency, though he had some thought of writing a lexicon on that interesting phase of the English language, with an appendix, tracing the history, say, of the word "Tory" or "Conservative" from its anthropomorphic beginnings to its present significance ; and the word "Radical," like the inverted Darwin theory, from its once fiery Olympian heights to its consequent anthropomorphia, when it fell into a new planet. But his idea was, after trying to speak well for them himself, to find one of themselves who would do it better, and in their own language, and himself to supply the assistance, the influence, the advice and the finances. People will have fads, and he was very rich and could play these games with impunity. Lord Listower was a wealthy

man, but Henry, his second son, was quite as wealthy, through his mother's good offices, she having bullied a childless sister, who had married a millionaire, long since dead, to leave the bulk of her wealth to this adored son in her will; and this legal business having been fully arranged, she proceeded to bully the childless sister, who was called Lady Anne Sheepshanks, and whose chief occupation was changing maids and keeping parrots, into a premature grave, which end was accomplished in a perfectly respectable manner, to the accompaniments of everything "suitable" to a great old lady's death, even to the saying "good-bye" to the "Family," whom, except Henry, she had hardly known, and also to the last of the maids, whose procession through her life had been a series of good-byes. When the funeral had been carried out with due stateliness, Lady Listower had come and overhauled the house, which contained an astonishing amount of Berlin wool work and blue rep, and had had the chief parrot stuffed, in memoriam. The last maid did not need this treatment, having gleaned fat things in the way of cheques. Thus it was that Henry became independent.

The quest of a disinterested working man had had, necessarily, to be pursued in stealth and silence. He could not, in the nature of him, be advertised for.

Stillingfleet's account of Mark Hading, on whom he had come quite by chance when carrying out some of his chief's schemes of

benevolence in South London, had made Vade prick up his ears. He commissioned the man to go at once and hear and speak with Hading, relying on that sharpness and even cynicism of judgment which made Stillingfleet so useful a person in social work. And before attending Hading's meeting he had taken care to see him and study his face, unknown to the man himself. He had been immensely struck by Mark's face, and he was a fair judge of such indexes.

So that, when the Islington meeting had confirmed his hopes of Mark's tremendous oratorical powers and remarkable influence over his kind, he felt that things were well in train, and that the man only required sounding, and his personal and private affairs investigating, to get the business started in real earnest.

There was no time to be lost. A general election was imminent and a weary Government tottering on a throne of incompetence; Labour questions were getting really tiresome in their agitation; and the kindly, incompetent women at home, who made and bought endless dollies and little woolly clothes and warm things for "the poor creatures" out of the real kindness of their hearts, were beginning to look at the law-makers at home and say, "But why is it? Can't something be done?" like children, with the unanswerable, open, direct eyes of children really distressed. Willing to give up, dear hearts, a jewel or a



dress for "those poor things," or to join any amount of desperately dull committees (not to say attend them), if by it all some vague good could come to some vague, miserable babies and women in "the East."

There would shortly be an opening in Walworth. The Radical candidate, Sir Samuel Crawshay, was sick of the sheer impossibility of his position, and would not stand again. He knew Vade's ideas, and would not be sorry to be so peacefully relieved of his well-nigh hopelessly incompatible duties and conscience. Crawshay was a big, stoutly-built man, with curly red hair and a smooth-shaven face and half-fierce, half-humorous grey eyes—a man whom Heaven had intended for a really nice country squire. But birth had made him a baronet, and some ambition and less judgment had made a Radical member for a London division at a time when it was still rather original and daring and wicked to be a Radical; and when all his cousins, whom he hated, were more or less in office under a Conservative Government, and he had a sort of seething territorial desire to spite them, just as his fathers had cheerfully warred with the same branch of the family in ruder days over crops and pigs, wire fencings and rights-of-way. Ordinarily, he was the most good-natured person in the world, and was loved by his cronies, with whom he was geniality itself; but he was too much of the soil for his line of politics—his very curly, sunburnt hair seemed



odorous of gorse-covered moorlands, and the swing of his walk suggested rattling with fine terriers on a racy, breezy morning. Even his time-honoured hatred of those priggish cousins of his had a feudal, baronial dash about it that made the blood circulate to listen to. To bring a really vituperative hate of one's own relations into the very shadow of St Stephen's requires something of the breeziness of blood of those old lords of the soil.

But now the day of the Government was waning: the cousins by this time in a state of lassitude, mental and physical. One of them was going about in a Bath chair showing bulletins about himself in the papers, and another was living on a patent food and cutting down his hours of sleep, that is of professed sleep, and consequently their tenure was of but doubtful possibility.

Sir Samuel, who had fought his own political battles well, felt that nothing worse could happen to the foe than this gradually-falling curtain of dubiousity, and had resolved to go back to his turnip fields for a year or two and snort at the enemy from those broader climes. And meanwhile to shoot at worthier game.

Thus was Vade's chance, and having found his man he was not long in putting him forward for election.

He and Stillingfleet went to see Mark the day after the Islington meeting, and with him discussed the offer frankly. Sitting in the little parlour, looking over a backyard contain-

ing a grey tub and some leafless plants stuck in Tate sugar boxes, the three men had had an hour's close converse, all of them as supremely unconscious of winding the web of any special destiny as anything male can be: it requires the feminine instinct to recognise Clotho's loom. A man, unless he is a poet, will ply the shuttle in and out of the warp and woof, yet never dream of what he is doing. And this grand insensibility is called practical sense. One of the finest elements in the masculine mind is its blank and beautiful indifference to the future. Seeing no shadow it has no fears. That spirit has made England.

To Mark Hading, Vade's proposal came as a vision become reality, as a dream realised. It was come at last—the power to do, not merely to talk. For the first few minutes he hardly knew how to speak, so great was his joy and gratitude. For years—ah, what years!—he had been dumb, at any rate in his own estimation. And there is no suffering like dumbness to those who have anything to say. He was thirty-eight now, and ever since he was fourteen had worked and worked, and burned, and longed, and had found no area of self-expression. He was by trade a printer, having worked up from the earliest and grimest of beginnings as a “devil” to the post of foreman in a great printing-house: and through all those long years of black and steady toil his heart had flamed with the fiery sense of a power chained within him, a capacity for doing and

daring for his fellows which it seemed could never find its wings and bear him out of the sordid drudgery of the printing-office to a wider field of men and things.

In the earlier agonies of his twenties, when the mighty power struggled within him, and the cramping poverty of his daily work had eaten into his very soul, for he then earned very little, and had a drunken mother to keep, he lost all hope for a time and had ranked himself with atheism, the bald, obvious, almost childish naïve atheism of the very young and the very unlettered. Going to and fro to his work in mud and fog and rain, badly fed, poorly shod, stung with a sense of bitter if vague injury against social conditions, and sometimes with a nobler sense of a wish to alleviate some of the misery he daily saw around him, and yet conscious of unutterable limitations, he passed through a mill of suffering for years, through which many less gifted than he are daily passing—the suffering of dumbness.

Then, in a great heave of sheer despair, when the miserable, degraded home and the hopeless mother, his then poor health and toiling days made the world seem well-nigh impossible, he had joined a struggling night class for the small, pathetic study of something—a little nightly meeting of men, beyond the miserable grind for bread which was dragging them down to animal existence. An older comrade, who had joined, recommended this to him, and he had joined partly to avoid the

awful home-going at night and its alternative, the public-house; and partly in the hope of solving some of the raging tumult of blind problems within him. Sticking to this class, he had learnt in five years enough to open up new worlds to his starved mind, and as time went on and his position in the printing-house was raised he pursued his careful course of self-education till he began to feel the inward yearning no longer an agony of latent birth but an exuberant joy—the joy of conscious power. Then another influence had come to him. One night he had gone home later than usual to find the light in his mother's lodging still burning and frowsy neighbours hanging like moths about the doors and staircase. He went in and upstairs hurriedly, and found his mother lying on her bed, purple of face, gasping for breath, and by her side a woman with the calmest face he had ever seen, gently ministering to her wants. The filthy room had been restored for once to some semblance of neatness, and there was a clean bed-cover over the old woman's form, and some little comforts on the table at the side, on which a trim lamp was burning.

The strange woman came towards him, and, taking him outside the door, had gently told him that his mother had a fit and could not live many days. She explained modestly that she was a Mission woman, and had been in the habit of visiting his mother of late, hence her being called in at this juncture. Her name



was Dorcas Deane, she said, in answer to his question ; she was a widow.

She was a revelation of a new world to him. Her face was of that beauty which is without any connection with material things ; it was as indescribable as the pale light in the east that comes before the dawning—the light that shone on Mary Magdalene when she went her spice-laden way to the garden grave.

It was a face which bore in it a pale candle of the Divine, and as such it arrested the heart so that the mind forgot to criticise. In mere outward description it was an oval face—rather a long oval—with features of a general straightness and simplicity, but not remarkable in themselves, save the pure, gently-compressed mouth and the rather deeply-set dark hazel eyes under a brow clear and calm and wide. She had dark brown hair, plainly lifted back from her forehead and neatly knotted, and she wore a closely-fitting bonnet, like a nurse's, and a plain grey-cloaked costume or deaconess's habit. She was, frankly, a humble woman as to birth and education, and possibly thirty to thirty-five years old. But there was over her calm features an expression, an all-pervading aroma, as it were, of such tenderness, such innocence, such perfect purity and grace that she gave an impression of something transparent, lighted from within by a radiance not of this world.

She seemed to bring order and a calm wisdom in her very footsteps. Her entrance



into a room could restore by its very influence a sense of the right balance of things ; storms and imagined injuries faded and sank before the touch of her kind hand, had often done so in her ministrations amongst her miserable little flock ; gutter children quarrelling would drop their eyes before her tender, accusing look, and great shameless women, ablaze with some street feud, would look deprecatingly and subside from screams to an awkward mutter when her clear, soft voice broke on their heated storms like the calm sound of clear waters plashing in a thirsty land.

To Hading she was a spirit of balm in the midst of the confusion of his miserable home. And during the following nights and days, when his wretched mother lay struggling for release, it was Dorcas who brought peace to the tumult and order to the place. When, at the last hour, the sinful creature she tended spoke to her and asked for comfort, she gave it in words so simple, so priest-like, so certain in their absolute hope, that Hading, who was by, and hearing her message in the light of her deeds, knew for the first time what the religion of Christ meant, and what it could mean to himself and others.

After his mother's death he did not lose sight of this new friend, and from her counsel and prayers there grew in him a desire for a religious life, a higher strength, such as she seemed to possess. In his curiosity to know the secret of her power—and Mark

had always adored power of any sort—he had himself learnt the secret, and from that day forth his long-tied tongue was loosed and his glorious hidden genius leapt forth, loosened from its bonds by the great hand of that Force which sets free the captive and breaks the gates of brass.

From that time, as a Christian Socialist, he worked incessantly for others in the free time his trade allowed him. He quickly became known to Labour workers and trades-unions, and got engagements to speak on platforms of various sorts for the sheer fire of his eloquence in more and more abundance till he was obliged to resign his printing work and take to this career entirely.

He had married, a year after his mother's death, the daughter of his old night-school comrade, with whom, as such men will, he had fallen suddenly and violently in love, though the girl was a child to him and utterly unable to comprehend his aims and character.

His idea was to found a comfortable home, and vaguely he wanted a woman unconnected with his work and wishes to preside over it. Strong men often deeply resent women's assistance, especially if those women are their wives. Some instinct of this sort had drifted Dorcas Deane out of his vision when thoughts of marrying had come to him—the very woman who would and could have helped him. He wanted to work alone in all his power; the woman must sit by the hearth and look

pretty—he insisted on her looking pretty, having the strong artistic instinct that was inseparable from his almost histrionic talent. He forgot that she might find that occupation dull. Even ignorant, selfish girls can be bored. And Chloris was bored, miserably so. She had never been in earnest, and she considered such a state of mind most stupid. Consequently the unhappiness of the marriage was, in many ways, beginning to be felt by both of them, in many a little strain and tug, in Clo's frank irreligion, in her slovenly ways and her longings for the squalid gaiety of her world, when Vade's proposal had come in all its wonder.

The little house the Hadings lived in was Mark's—he was already a householder in the place he hoped to represent. And after the first few days of delirious excitement following the proposal, and the tumult of fresh plans and business arrangements, he had to set about making room in his little dwelling for wider demands of his coming life.

There were only six rooms in the house, and of these Dorcas Deane, their lodger, occupied two. She would have to go, said Mark, to make space for his new business, and to allow a room for him to see people in. Clo pouted.

"Are many horrid men coming here?" she said ungraciously. She hardly realised in the least degree what Vade's designs might mean to both her husband and herself.

"There will be much to do, and I shall have to see a great many people," he answered. "I must have a room to see them in. A great work is before me, and I shall need to be much occupied, little Flower, so you must try to help me in every way and be a good girl."

"I shall hate saying good-bye to Mrs Deane," said the girl. "She does preach, but she's kind. But still, if you're going to be grand and go into Parliament and all that, I suppose I must put up with lots of changes. Shall I have nicer clothes? And can I have a new hat? There's a big green one I saw covered with lovely feathers; and there's other things I want too, any amount. Some earrings, for one thing—not old hair things like Mrs Tombs's, but bright jewels all glittering, like that lady's."

"Oh! my dear," he said a little sadly, "you shall have the best I can give you as soon as I can manage it. Try to be patient: try to think of the work I shall be able to do for others and help me to accomplish it. In good time I hope to give you what you seem to love so. But just now can't you think for those who suffer and are sad? Can't you put self aside for this grand future of doing good?"

But Clo sighed and shrugged and picked up a halfpenny magazine, a periodical which informed her, among other things, how to get a husband, how to make a dress for ten shillings, how to make a dressing-table out of a packing-case and some Nottingham lace: what to say

at an evening party : where to sell postage stamps : and hints on bee-keeping : also how to keep her hair on—the last not, perhaps, totally unnecessary advice to the readers of the bewildering journal in question. But when Mark had gone out the spirit that fell upon her at the Islington meeting, when his noble words had stirred her, in combination with the mass of sad faces she saw so eagerly listening, came to her again, and she felt a vague, disquieting sting of remorse. And limply picking up a hearth-brush she went and swept up the cinders choking the grate as a first faint little dole to conscience.

If Mark was to do great things she would try to do things too: but old habits die hard, and she sighed as she brushed the dirty grate and felt herself so far behind her leader.



## CHAPTER V

IF you buy a slum girl a new hat and get her to wash her face, and then bow to her in the street, you may in course of time get her to see with you the eternal verities. Most reformers commence operations in reverse ratio. You will find, from Savonarola to an Albert Hall mission, that the professional good will expect from the penitent world a vast sacrifice of all the little gods to make room for the One, and moreover for that sacrifice to be instantaneous. Which is unreasonable. Savonarola made the Venetian dames throw down their jewels upon conversion: the wily Romans who brought Christianity to our shores did otherwise. Do not we owe Valentine's Day to that very willingness?—a pagan festival not sternly vetoed but re-named Christian? Half the Christian symbols, from mistletoe to plum puddings, as everyone knows, are pure pagan re-christened. So the first missionaries of England weaned that little island gradually from its follies, rather than demand a dramatic and practically impossible surrender on the "stand-and-deliver system."

On Chloris Hading a dim sense had begun to dawn that there was perhaps an outer sphere

beyond the interminable drab streets, varied by music-halls and public-houses, that made up her world. Of course it was very vague, and it was only now and then clear enough to be even passingly conscious. And of course she knew, and had always known, that there was a land where the ladies in fashion pictures lived, those very smiling ladies with such wonderfully curved figures; and of course the music-halls showed her ladies of real beauty and aristocracy—ladies who had reached the summit of being photographed smiling—more than smiling—on picture post-cards. Higher than that (or wider) you could hardly go in one way. Yet just a few of these goddesses sometimes descended from Olympus and lived, when they had any fixed abode, in Clo's neighbourhood, and she knew that even they came down to a very mundane level in such trifles as being short of money for rent, and inclined to bargain at street stalls, and to be glad of a meal, and so on. So that, as a fairly prosperous working-man's wife, she had even sometimes looked down on them. But now she began to get an inkling that there might be something beyond them, something more satisfying, more stable, more intrinsically beautiful.

I may point out in this connection that we have already seen that she was listless and discontented, and had always been so. Her face was spoilt by the outward signs of that disaffection. Yet sometimes discontent is divine, even discontent that is much less picturesque

than Hamlet's. It is not to be advised to pretty girls, yet just occasionally the soul in the pretty casket makes the habit inevitable, if the soul is above the casket's surroundings, that is to say. Even in slums they sometimes have the blind yearning after beauty, in Ruskin's sense of the word.

Up to the present she had lived her sordid life dully, gleaning a certain satisfaction here and there, yet inwardly rebelling at something—she could not have told you what. To her limited vision there were certain things in the world that were joys—namely, new hats, music-halls, bank holidays, peppermints, cheap blouses and admiration; other things that were bores (she had never known absolute sorrow)—namely, bad weather, good people, limited wardrobes, duty and household work. And considering that she had married a good person, whose means made small wardrobes a necessity together with household work, and considering that duty and marriage are inseparable (in spite of America and modern romance), she stood a really good chance of being bored.

But it was not only that. The soul with any life in it seeks for ultimate joy. And there were limits to the joys of even a new hat with an immense feather: there were boundaries to the glory to be got out of a better mock pearl necklace than one's neighbour's; and sometimes even Georgie Hicks, acting a tipsy frog at the Jollity, sent one home bored and cross with the universe.

Wholly inarticulate, Clo was suffering, had suffered, for a long time owing to this semi-tragic unsatisfactoriness of life. Happily she could not express it. The women who can are quite intolerable. But a small incident helped to arouse her hopes of something rather better eventually dawning on her horizon.

A few days after Vade and Stillingfleet had called to see her husband she had met Sir Samuel Crawshay. He was an old friend of Vade's, who had asked him to drop in and see the man he was taking up. Vade had said that the man's wife was awful—his epithet was "a little Cockney cat." Mark was out when this visitor was announced by a neighbour's child shrieking, "Mrs 'Ading, you're a-wanted!" and jumping up to the door knocker and banging it in jerks.

Clo, who was busy getting rather sulkily through some morning household tasks, came unwillingly down the stairs to greet the stranger. She wore an old washed-out blue cotton blouse that wanted a collar and showed her very long and beautifully-formed neck to advantage, though it did not make her look too tidy. A shabby old skirt and a soiled apron completed her attire. She found Sir Samuel standing in the little passage. She stood still on the stairs at seeing him, while a dull flush slowly rose to her face and suffused her neck. She dexterously untied the strings of her apron and slipped it off. She had not expected more than a tax-collector or a man vending sewing-



machines, and here was a gentleman. Something told her a real gentleman. Instinct said someone better even than a tailor's tout, of the kind who in gorgeous frock coats and decorated with artificial flowers stood outside tailors' shops and invited buyers within with great insinuation.

He looked up at her as she turned the corner of the little staircase, and immediately removed his hat. He saw her hesitate on the stairs and came forward a little and affably explained his errand—affably that is for him, for his manner was always a little stolid, and he had a way of looking at you, with his full, grey eyes out under his brows, that was very far removed from gushing.

In that curt fashion that was her Cockney habit she told him that her husband was out; but her voice was low, as is the voice of him who sees something interesting and new on close terms for the first time and is busy with observations. Just as you might speak if you met the ghost of Pharaoh and he asked you the way to Westminster. Crawshay looked good-humouredly at the shy girl clinging on to the frail little hand rail of the tiny staircase. He thought her eyes were pretty.

"Are you Mrs Hading?" he said, quite gently, as one addresses an equal.

"Yes," she said slowly, beginning to feel a dim pleasure in the fact. "I can give any message to Mark if you like—sir."

She was sufficiently encouraged to come



down the stairs and stand before him in the hall. By doing so she observed that he was a very brown-faced, healthy-looking gentleman, and that he had a hardened and "toned" air about him through living in the fresh air, something akin to the look of an outdoor plant as compared to an anæmic castor-oil weed she had on her landing window-sill. He seemed to bring some of the fresh air in with him. The girl, herself pale and opaque and sickly-looking, and accustomed to men and women flying her own sad signals, felt a little thrill of dim envy at the invading gentleman who seemed so strong, and rich, and well, and so conscious of it all. And yet so polite to her.

"Never mind, many thanks," he said quite smilingly. "I will call some other time. Will you say I came—Crawshay—Sir Samuel Crawshay. Can you remember?"

She shyly promised to do so, and was going to open the door wider for him to go out, when one of the dirty children playing on the steps, the very one who had banged upon the knocker, now dashed suddenly into the tiny hall, and made a header for the Mission woman's door, a constant refuge of such gutter cherubim. In her butting flight the little imp unwittingly ran her head against Clo, pushing her roughly against the wall. Crawshay pulled the child away by her arm and looked at her laughingly.

"You're a very rough little monkey," he said. "Do you call yourself a little girl? I

call you a little steam engine. You shouldn't run into a house like that. See, you have hurt the lady."

"Lidy!" said the child, laughing all over its wrinkly little face and wriggling like an eel in Crawshay's grasp; "that's only Mrs 'Ading. That ain't no lidy!"

"You've got very bad manners," said he, pinching her and letting her go, at which she shrieked with laughter and danced away delighted. "Poor little souls," he said in a different voice, turning again to Clo, "one wonders where they all get to, or grow to. They're a terrible puzzle. Do you help your husband in his work, Mrs Hading?"

Clo blushed quite suddenly.

"Why, no," she said shamefacedly, again confronted with that vague sense of self-reproach that the meeting had awakened. "I couldn't, you know—couldn't speak to men about Parliament like Mark does. And there isn't anything else to do."

He looked at her quizzically but kindly.

"Why, no," he said, imitating her in a half-whimsical way, "there isn't—for him. But I should have thought, from the way the youngsters play about your door-steps, and run in and out and upset you promiscuously, that you could do something for them. I thought possibly you did. Ladies often take a kindly interest in such miserable little beggars."

"Oh! they come after the Mission woman,"

said the girl; "she loves them—never tired of them, she isn't. But I don't see that I could do anything for them." Her voice sounded half-defiant, half-questioning. He turned and looked humorously at a jumping elf on the door-step in a torn jacket from which one sleeve was entirely gone and the other going, pointing with his stick at the sartorial bleakness of this costume.

"There's a specimen of something to be done," he said, "though it looks as though the time for doing much good had gone by. Don't know, either, whether such a being's father (if he has anything so respectable) possesses a vote. So don't worry, Mrs Hading. Good-bye. Tell your husband I came."

He held out his hand and shook hers, smiled at her kindly, raised his hat, and went away, leaving behind him an impression of courtesy and encouragement and healthy good-humour.

Clo stood a moment, thinking deeply. Then she called to the gentleman with the torn sleeve to come in.

"Sha'n't," replied that worthy, staring round at her, arrested in his antics in amaze at her impudence in asking him.

"But I want you," she said, trying to soften her hard curt accents to coax the child to obey her. "I want to do something nice for you. I'll—I'll—give you a slice of bread and butter if you'll come in for a minute."

This brought the gentleman, butter being a rarity in those parts. But he came mistrust-

fully up the stairs to her little room. When she had given him the bread and butter she searched for her needle and cotton from amongst a heap of untidy bits of sewing, all massed together with a penny novel, a hat, a paper bag of bananas, a card of boot buttons and a grocer's calendar, and at length found these implements. Then she induced him to take off his jacket (an operation painfully easy to accomplish since there was only one sleeve), and a little shamefacedly proceeded to mend the miserable rag, so far as it could be mended. The owner, eating bread and butter, looked on in amaze—as much amaze as a cynical Cockney gutter baby can be brought to show.

“Well, you're a shocker, you are,” he said, slowly contemplating her, “a shillin' shocker, given away free, gritis, and for nuthin'. Mend-in' while you wait, ladies and gentlemen. Bring in yer 'ats and coats and trousers—here's a lidy as 'ull mend 'em all, lightnin' speed g'ranteed!”

But Clo stitched on, half defiantly. When the dreary garment was done she put it on him, upon which he drew himself up with a proud air, pinched up his features to a haughty smile, and minced away down the stairs and out into the street after the fashion of the “cake walk” movement, in a manner so inimitable that even Clo was lured into a smile at the thing's unspeakable genius for comedy, if the pathos of the occasion did not strike her greatly. She was too used to it.



"There now!" she said to herself proudly, "now I've helped him."

She did not say whether by "him" she alluded to Mark or the sleeveless arab, but she seemed to have gained some inward satisfaction from the act. She went back to her household duties a little elevated in spirit, that strange elevation a charity performed will bring to the most hardened. Two or three times over her small tasks she thought of the brown-faced gentleman and his courteous speech. He had seemed to respect her and he had called her a "lady." Again she went back to the puzzling question—What was a "lady"? Was it her blouse that made him say it? She had known a lady to be made by a new blouse before this, at anyrate in her own estimation. She went into the little bedroom and looked at herself critically in the greyish cracked mirror. No, it was not the washed-out blue blouse. Even she saw its disadvantages in this direction. But it seemed worth while to try to live up to the title. To-morrow she would wash a better one she had, and even this afternoon she would put on something tidier, she told herself. But he had seemed to take it for granted that a lady helped her husband and did kindnesses to little children. That was queer. That had never been her own definition. Still, it was decidedly interesting, because he seemed a real gentleman and so must know. She paused once or twice over her small cooking operations, with a cooking



spoon poised in the air, thinking out this momentous problem. When she did so a nicer look, a thinking look, came into her face and softened it. Out over the little drab yard at the back, beyond the endless stacks of little grey chimneys and slate roofs to where a peep of real sky showed out of the unutterable dullness, she turned her meditating green eyes, trying to pierce out the answer to this puzzle. So struggles the little glimmering soul after a better light: and out of such blind, squalid gropings comes the eventual discovery of aspiration, the best discovery in the world.

What, then, if she were really to try now to do what this gentleman seemed to think ladies did? She had always thought ladies did little more than wear artificial pearls and look scornful and avoid work. But his idea seemed worth thinking out. She would try it, anyhow. She need not tell Mark, just at first. She would not even tell Dorcas Deane. Suppose they "preached." If they did she would get rebellious again and not try to be a lady at all. It was a very faint little shoot of aspiration, very delicate and ready to shiver away in any east wind of criticism, as yet. But she had the sense to keep it secret. You are not reared in cities for nothing. You learn at least a sort of instinctive caution in these matters in sheer self-defence.

So the next day this bashful beginner sent for another ragged child, brought her in, washed her face, gave her some bread and

jam, and mended some rents in her frock while she talked to her. That was not easy. A life-long habit of curt speeches is hard to overcome. Perhaps a child can coax it away more quickly than any other being. This child was a pretty little girl of eight, with a laughing oval face and long straight flaxen hair, and roguish blue eyes. The sinner thought herself in luck to get jam and attentions for nothing, and giggled wickedly and archly, and banged her heels on the box she was sitting on in ecstatic self-congratulation. Clo was mending her bodice for her, and as she leant back against the grey wall, one lovely baby shoulder poked up out of a ragged chemise, the creature looked for all the world like some deathless Greuze laughing eternal youth and beauty over a pearly shoulder down the shadows of the years.

"I shall send Jemima 'ere," said the gutter seraph, twinkling at the thought, "so I shall."

"Who is Jemima?" said Clo.

"That's my pal," said the girl; "she's worse off 'n me. She haven't got a bodice to mend. Say, missis, you might make her one?"

"Send her to me to-morrow afternoon," said the would-be lady, "I'll see what I can do for her. There's one I could alter for her if I tried a bit."

And so the days went on. Every afternoon or evening one good thing was done for one child: very little things, but very useful ones in the aggregate. The girl began slowly, very

slowly, to like her task. She heard more every day of her husband's future work and hopes, and she began to have a solid sort of consciousness of doing some small thing herself towards that work, all the more solid for being kept dark from everybody. Crawshay little knew the amazing impetus his few remarks had given to a little floundering soul!

And now, as more money came to hand and their little household was not so pinched for means as of old, the young wife began to feel the joys of another sort of pride. Little comforts were added to the rooms: there was a new sitting-room carpet, and better food became usual. Her husband gave her more money for her dress and told her to make herself look "nice." When this happened first, for a moment her mind flew to the possibilities of cheap finery that his generosity opened up. A month ago she would have spent every farthing on useless fripperies in one afternoon. To-day she hesitated, just a little. She dressed herself one fine afternoon in a cheaply smart arrangement, and set off to do her shopping with some importance. She would have a very fine bright blue blouse trimmed with yellow lace (two and eleven three, she said to herself), and a mock smart skirt, and a hat all pink may, and other joys. As she turned out of her own street and entered the vulgar and busy main road where a great sprawling cheap draper's straddled along the wayside as if let loose into half a dozen separate shops, with its bales of

flannelette and art muslin and oilcloth obstructing the pathway, covered with flaring tickets, she heard herself weakly called.

“Lidy!” said the voice, “Lidy!”

It was Jemima, the friend of the Greuze gutter beauty. It was very much nearer a monkey in appearance than a child, and a hat of which the brim and crown had almost entirely severed company rested uncertainly on a tangled head. Out of the gaping boots several cold toes showed. But through all the frowse and rags one was conscious of a smile, a really wide, beaming smile. That was all. The creature was simply contemplating the “lidy” who had given it the jam and the bodice with sincere and grimy rapture. Clo stopped and looked at it meditatively, a look from which some of the worst defiance had gone, at anyrate for the moment. There was the magic word again—lady!

“Come here,” she said quietly, taking the child’s hand and turning into a boot shop next to the showy draper’s. A pair of small boots costing a few shillings were provided for the ecstatic Jemima and put on to her miserable little cold feet. Then from the next shop was bought a woolly hat and a little warm cape; and dressed in these infinite glories, from Clo’s purse, she was finally dismissed in the seventh heaven, while her benefactor passed on—half regretting her impulsive action, half pleased at having done it. But it precluded the buying of some of the designed finery, and the girl



walked on thinking this over. She would have to go plain now, for Jemima's sake. Mark had often said, rather sadly, that he wished she would be neat. Well, suppose she got something really plain for once, to please her husband, and tried that too along with her other experiments? It would be, perhaps, what ladies do? Somehow, whenever she pictured to herself seeing the breezy, brown-faced gentleman again, she always had an instinctive conviction that she would like him to see her neat. She had a sort of feeling that big crimson roses in a picture hat would be lost on him. Without knowing it he made her want to comb her hair out better and wash more carefully. This is unromantic, but it is a phase of human nature and must not be omitted.

So she very gallantly went past that gaudy draper's, not without pangs and turnings over her shoulder, and little heart-burnings, things that have come to most women, ever since Lot's wife, in such a tempting case. Oh! there was a hat there all long trails of laburnum. However was she going to pass it? Seven and eleven three! Oh! how hard it is to "arise and follow thy dream" in the glare of daily things and noonday. The living fire kindled at the altar stone in hours of silence flickers but faintly in the vulgar way and all the glare and fuss of daylight. It needs grit to follow it then. But she got past, sighing deeply and setting her teeth. Steadily she

walked on to where she knew there was a costume shop at which cheap but plain and tidy "coats and skirts" were offered for sale. Resolutely she entered this severe emporium. Not without wistfulness she chose, at the advice of the tall and black-clad "young lady," a dark grey cloth coat and skirt, neatly braided. She carried away her purchase by a little leather tag put on to the tidy parcel by the considerate show-room lady, and wended her way somewhere else and bought a very neat hat, not without a failing heart.

Then she went her way home, half inclined to cry, and looking really pretty for once in the womanly grace of this distress. There was a hideous barrel-organ blaring in her ears from the kerbstone, and the shouts of street vendors with carts of oranges, and rabbits, and shell fish, half deafened her and made her head ache. She had given away half her little stock of dress money to clothe a wretched child, and she wasn't so sure, after all, that it had made her a lady. Perhaps the gentleman was wrong, or only in fun? Anyhow she did not as yet feel any very violent uplifting in the social scale, and the street had never, never looked so common and so ugly and so rough, and those two parcels she carried contained such plain sedate clothes, and life was very puzzling.

I once heard an authority on such things say that when life became very puzzling to you it showed that you were beginning to solve it. It is only the hopelessly material of the human

species to whom such an experience never comes : he who will never have wings does not trouble himself as to the mechanism of flying. So we will presume that so far the blinded, groping good in her had won a small victory—a victory over self and vulgarity, a victory that meant passing twice in one walk the seat of the greatest temptation, the flaring draper's, and not repenting. It is not laughable, that petty triumph in a common breast in a common street. It is eternal and tremendous, as are all the issues of the human soul. Happily intentions are dearer to God than results. Otherwise there would be no use for the flutterings of such a little soul in such a sordid prison. And it is a law of Nature that all things have a use.

## CHAPTER VI

THE tiny house would hardly hold Mark's papers and many visitors, now the tide of change had really commenced, and the ground-floor rooms were rapidly vacated by the Mission woman who rented them, that he might use these as business offices or something closely approximating to that. Mrs Deane had secured another apartment in the same street, and with her usual unselfishness and amiability had said very little about the matter one way or the other, but had had her little goods removed with all the speed she could muster, as her humble part in the helping on of the man to whom her whole heart was given.

Her entire household stock had been easily removed for her by a neighbouring greengrocer, who, in addition to moving small household effects, sold coal, and poisoned cats—all for very small considerations.

When this woman who had been such a true friend to him was going Mark himself was out, but she came upstairs and kissed Clo, but refused to say "Good-bye" as she said she would be so near and it was not really parting from them.

She said it a little wistfully, however, though



she smiled. And the girl kissed her really affectionately, realising when she was going to leave them that this gentle friend was not so easy to lose as only a week or two ago she would have imagined.

"Dorcas," she said slowly, holding the woman's hand, "when Mark gets into Parliament and all that, I suppose he'll be a real gentleman?"

The Mission woman smiled.

"A gentleman is a man who is gentle," she said; "he is that now, dear. Why do you ask?"

"Because," said Clo, rather confusedly, "I suppose I shall be a lady, sha'n't I?"

"I have heard," said the woman, taking both the girl's hands in hers, "that a lady—the word, you know—really means 'loaf giver.' That is, you see, the one who gives away help and love and kindnesses to others, as you would give the hungry bread. In that sense you may begin to be a lady before Mark gets into Parliament, my little child."

"Yes," said the girl, a little impatient of the preaching, "I see. The gentleman seemed to think that. But aren't there lots of other things? Of course I know I'm a lady here—in this street. But I mean if I tried to be one anywhere else—with all those grand friends of Mark's, I mean, and the ladies they know. Like the pretty one—oh! she was lovely—who came to the meeting that night. Aren't there other things? Don't they talk French and play the piano?"

"Yes, some of them. But some do not. Some are only 'loaf givers.' At anyrate that is the right end to begin at, dear. You can always learn the French and the piano afterwards, can't you? French is no more difficult to learn than being good, and sweet, and gentle. In fact, I should say, dear, it was easier."

"And are all Mark's grand friends' ladies 'loaf givers'? Are they all kind like that?"

"Let us hope so."

"Mark doesn't like music-halls. Don't ladies ever go to music-halls?"

The woman looked puzzled.

"That I can't say. But a true lady obeys her husband."

"Do all Mark's friends' ladies obey their husbands, then?"

The woman shook her head and smiled.

"Why should we ask? At anyrate there are a few things they do which you could imitate, dearie. For instance, all ladies are clean and tidy. They love nice rooms and neat dress and peace and order. Then they are very thoughtful for another person in the same room with them—more thoughtful than for themselves. They speak gently, they never shout, or snap, or jerk. You can always tell them by that in the street or in any public place. They speak the truth, and they never say unkind things: and they never boast. What more can I tell you?"

"They must be awfully nice," said Clo,

thinking deeply of all this; "I hope Mark will get 'in' and take me where I can see them, that's all. They must be better than the lot we have about here, always quarrelling and snarling and calling each other names. Besides, they look pretty. That one did at the meeting. Oh, her dress was lovely!"

"Yes," said Dorcas, "it would be, because she was a nobleman's daughter, and that was the right dress, you see. For real ladies dress according to what they are. You understand, don't you? It's that which makes them always look so nice and so 'right' at the right time."

"*She* didn't," put in Clo, eagerly; "she looked very funny, she did, sitting there dressed all like that in bright yellow and jewels. That's why Jim Ball was rude to her."

"Yes, but you see she had never been to such a place before, perhaps, which would explain why she made such a mistake. She did not know how rough it would be. But still, dear, that is not the point. The point is that there are certain things that those who are really ladies have in common with one another. And those are the only things worth copying. You see, they are things that begin in the heart, and go on to the habits, and so change what was rough into something beautiful. Lately, I have observed you have been doing kindnesses to your little sorrowful friends. You have begun to be a 'loaf giver.' Why not go on with the neatness, and the cleanness

and the daintiness? Then you will be ready for Mark when he becomes a great man."

Dorcas's persuasive eloquence helped to show infinite light to the puzzled girl, and was all the more effective because the woman had the sense to avoid any distinct attempt at preaching, or what Clo would have resented as such. Her tact won where means of missionising on the usual lines would have failed dismally.

And Clo, much interested in the new idea, set to work to wash and re-arrange her frowsy hair: to re-order the fashion of her dress indoors, and to make some attempt at a gentler way of speech. All of which improvements were very successful, and won Mark's praise when he came home from a busy meeting. And from that time she began to feel a conscious self-respect in such matters, the first absolute foothold she had gained on the slippery, upward path.

One day she was invited out to tea, in honour of her husband's good fortune, by her neighbour the widow, an occasion when she was to meet the wife of another local magnate, a neighbouring undertaker called Trinder. This was out of compliment to Mark, and was counted as something of a state occasion. Clo, who was to go with Mrs Deane, dressed herself with care: for though well known to Mrs Tombs, she felt that she was now going in a new capacity on Mark's account and must try to live up to the little ideal she had set herself. She, too, was a little local magnate's wife.



So she put on the grey costume she had bought on the memorable afternoon when she had spent half of her dress money on Jemima, and the close-fitting, neat hat procured on the same day, and these reforms, together with a general freshening up and freer use of soap and water, improved her wonderfully. One began to see that she was a good-looking girl in a way, and besides fine eyes had very good hair, now it was more naturally arranged. She had always walked well, owing to the Board School drill, but her figure showed to great advantage in the close fit of the cloth costume. She was herself a little uncertain as to whether the change was an improvement or not. It takes a little time to alter one's ideas of taste. Still, she felt one satisfaction—if she should ever meet any of Mark's great friends this was the style she would like to be found in. And the importance of having now a career and a real reason for dressing and doing in a particular way outweighed the haunting sense of finery missed, at first a very real trouble. And Mark was so pleased at the change that she could not go back now. She was losing that abiding sense of discontent with the interest of having something definite to do and to live for. So she went to the party full of importance and pride.

At her neighbour's the little parlour had been made extra trim for the occasion by the joint labours of Mrs Tombs herself, dressed in the check wrapper and hair earrings, and her little workhouse maid, an Abigail who had

been got cheap on account of being chipped at the corners: she had lost an eye, and had only two fingers on one hand, those on the other being covered with chilblains; and her hair was in a chronic state of Hinde's curlers, which fell in hard metal lines over her large bald forehead apparently all day as well as all night, so that there was even a doubt as to the existence of her hair. She was a hard-working little person, of a somewhat stern trend of character, and carried her curling-pinned head very high on a pair of bottle-shaped shoulders, and made sweeping and fierce remarks in a deep voice, none the less effective because she had very short legs and stumped away after making one, like a small duck quacking bass.

Clo and Mrs Deane arrived together, followed almost immediately by Mrs Trinder, who had really arrived at the same time as they, but had, on seeing them, slipped diplomatically into a little side door belonging to the general dealer's at the corner, and waited till they had passed and preceded her. Her dignity insisted that she should arrive the last of the party, as Royalties do.

A little of the sawdust from the general dealer's floor still adhered to the edge of her black skirt as she entered Mrs Tombs's parlour, but she had the presence of mind to give it a little shake and say impatiently, "Dear dear! it's that horrid carpentering of Mr Trinder's. The men are that careless."

This remark gave at once the impression that the cheerful occupation of coffin-making was a mere hobby of Mr Trinder's, equivalent to another man's golf: also that it employed a large number of "hands"—the highest possible distinction in that *coterie*.

Something of Hading's prospects was beginning to filter about the place—it was now six weeks since Vade's step had been taken—and Mrs Trinder had just an inkling that young Mrs Hading, whom up to the present she had only known by sight, and rather despised, would one day be as great, in a sense, as herself. She felt, on these grounds, an overweening desire to question her while this could still be done with impunity, partly to find out her mental pose, and partly to show her own superiority. Mrs Deane she considered as distinctly beneath the company, a mere Mission woman, a person who attended to the corpses before they had reached the dignity and utility of being corpses: the person who, like the doctor, only saw them part of their way, only indeed as far as the crossing of the bar, after which Mr Trinder undertook their safe conduct in a far more masterly manner, putting such jobbers to rout entirely.

The tea was brought in by the maid in metal pins, and while a stage-whisper argument went on between this Abigail and Mrs Tombs as to the absence of the "best" sugar basin and complicated directions as to where to find it, Mrs Trinder spoke to Clo,

studying her clothes the while with a swivel-like eye travelling slowly up and down and around her unassuming stuff dress.

"How long have you been married?" she said.

"Two years," answered the ever-brief Clo. Mrs Trinder paused after this highly graceful opening to drink her tea, her eye appearing still over the top rim of her cup and rolling swivel-wise over Clo's *tout ensemble*, like a rising moon appearing over a hill-side and performing slow capers.

"Have you any children?" she continued.

"No," was the answer.

"*Really?*" said Mrs Trinder, an expression of plain disapproval of some sort coming into her face. "Has your husband given up his printing?" she proceeded.

"Yes. Has yours given up his burying?" retorted Clo.

"My, of course not!" exclaimed Mrs Trinder, indignantly.

"No, indeed," put in Mrs Tombs, "where should we all be if Mr Trinder did *that*, I should like to know? Where should we all be without him to bury us proper, with black-edged cards and silver lily of the valley all k'rect, and the best Florentine marble, and black gloves for the company all found, and that Christian smile of his, and as reasonable a bill at the end of it—with a heart, anchor and cross on the bill head, an' discount on cash—as a body could hope to have sent in when all is over."



Mrs Tombs did not mean to give the impression that Mr Trinder's bill was sent in to the corpse; she used the word "body" in a familiar sense, as indicating something rather less than a lady. As she was openly addressing Mrs Deane at the time the word was felt to be only fitting. Mrs Deane smiled gently.

"Indeed," she said, "the poor speak often of Mr Trinder's kindness, and what he has many a time done for them in their darkest times, when perhaps the bread-winner has been taken. If I may say it, I think God will reward Mr Trinder for his great goodness."

She said it gently enough. But Mrs Tombs shook her head—she had a strong objection to the Holy Name and thought "Providence" a far more correct title: while Mrs Trinder gave a watery smile with a sniff in it, like a fine day with a nasty wind round the corners.

But Dorcas had this in common with Lord Henry Vade—she seemed incapable of looking snubbed. She went on calmly with her tea with an expression of serenity far from what Mrs Trinder considered becoming in a "person." Mrs Tombs, setting her down briefly as "Methody," was less inclined to consider the matter at all. A "body" was after all but a "body," and little worthy of consideration.

Mrs Trinder, after eating violently for a few minutes and surveying Clo out of the corner of her pale eye, suddenly and without the least

warning plunged headlong into an account of the furniture in her sister-in-law's house, the beauty of her children, herself, her husband, and the cost of her clothes. As no one present knew, or indeed had even heard of, the sister-in-law before this conversation was faintly embarrassing. Mrs Tombs alone supported it by admiring exclamations prodded into the monologue at intervals. Gentle Mrs Deane occasionally inclined her head when the windy words seemed to surge in her direction, but Clo looked the quiet contempt she now instinctively felt for this volcanic eruption of ignorant snob-bishness. Ladies, she had heard, never boasted.

When Mrs Trinder at last, in describing a suite of "furnitchy" of unimaginable price, and a little boy's velvet suit which cost "Four pound ten—I tell you true," suddenly broke down for want of breath, the hair-pinned servant came forward, and muttering a few grunted words, put the "best" sugar basin down on the table with a flop.

"Well, what's the good of that now?" said Mrs Tombs, fretfully; "it's no good bringing it when we've done."

This remark coming exactly in the place where Mrs Trinder had expected a burst of awe-stricken applause, her ready ire was roused. Disappointment stung her, and very red in the face and glaring at the maid she said loudly,—

"That's a very lazy girl you've got."

"Which is more'n your tongue is," shouted out the servant with eyes blazing like signal lamps;

"it does rattlin' good work for you, I'll be bound!"

Mrs Tombs looked horrified.

"Jenny," she said, "how dare you speak so to a lady at my table?"

"Lady is she?" said Jenny; "there's ladies here at your table as I wouldn't say a word to for twenty best sugar basins. But I don't call them in the buryin' trade ladies."

"Give over, girl!" cried Mrs Tombs. "Get out of the room, do, I'm astonished at you."

"Which I've said and which I mean," went on Jenny, backing solemnly to the door. "Let her wait, says I, till she writes my epitaph before she starts to call me names!"

With which she waddled out and slammed the door, leaving the little company staring in consternation. The furious and now speechless Mrs Trinder was torn between a desire to rise and sail haughtily for ever out of the low circle of Mrs Tombs's friends and servants, and a dim but harrowing uncertainty as to whether, being the greatest lady there, she ought not to outstay the other two guests. This raging conflict between wrath and precedent shook the sulphur yellow flowers in her bonnet and set a limp grey bow wagging; her pale eyes shone livid, her thin face came out a dull greyish red, and her hands picked angrily and violently at her gown. The silence was pregnant with wrath and storm. There was an awful pause. Mrs Deane came to the rescue.

"Strange that these little souls," she said

gently, "should so readily fly to anger. This eager child, Mrs Tombs, has lost her little head to think that she should be called idle. You, my dear madam," she continued, addressing the trembling and voiceless Mrs Trinder, "have shown us the sweetness of patience in refraining from uttering a word when most provoked. We thank you for your forbearance, it is a sweet thing for us to see."

Anything less sweet than the epitome of ugly passions in the mean, fine bonnet before her it would be hard to find, and for a moment the seething rage of the little great lady seemed likely to turn itself on to the innocent Dorcas. She hesitated for a moment, then a strange thing happened. Whether it was the gentle "my dear madam" (Oh! to be madam!), or the cooling feel of the soft, calm voice and calmer spirit pervading the heated air of rage and insulted self—whether it was that beautiful grave face, that quiet look of respect, or that wonderful seeing of good in evil—or all these things together, certainly the strained hot eyes of Mrs Trinder fell a little, her breathing calmed down, her hands ceased twitching, and her glance lighted on the Mission woman with a new look of almost curiosity. Had she been sweet? Had she been patient? It was a new idea. This woman thought so; anyhow, she would for once live up to it.

"Well," she said slowly, and very low, "I'm sure you're very kind to say so. I—I—I s'pose there's times when some of us must show the—



the—Chri'shun spirit." She faltered a little—she was somewhat doubtful yet as to whether she ought to take praise for the silence of that voiceless rage. Then in her poor clouded mind dawned the faintest ray of an idea that she might begin deserving it now. She turned to her trembling hostess.

"Don't scold the girl, Mrs Tombs," she said, a little largely and pompously it is true, but still with sincerity. "I'll not remember her words, nor blame you, as is always a lady, for them."

Mrs Tombs burst into tears of real gratitude and held out her poor old hands tremulously.

"Dear Mrs Trinder," she said, "how good you are. Oh! that this should happen to a guest of mine!"

Dorcas Deane rose up from her place and came and kissed the little widow.

"Let us all forget it," she said. Mrs Trinder, not to be left behind, gave her hostess a peck of her own which stood for a kiss and was quite as sincere if less pleasant than Dorcas's. And this general restoration of a happier spirit so glorified the tea-party that it went on till the end of an hour in the kindest glow of geniality and good feeling.

When Clo and the Mission woman came away, the girl, who had been very silent, said,—

"Dorcas, won't you teach me to do those things, to—to—be like you?"

"Not me—not like me," said Dorcas, softly, her eyes shining, "like the Master, little

Chloris. Come into my new room, dear, and let us talk."

When they went into the little plainly-furnished parlour which the woman now rented in the same street, the furniture of which she knew so well and despised so much, with its coloured Scripture pictures on the walls, and its ugly in-artistic texts in frames, the girl broke out in a protest.

"I shall never really be like you, Dorcas. I couldn't love—the—things you do. I don't like that Mrs Trinder, though you made her nicer all at once. I know nothing about goodness. But if Mark is going to be great and do great things, I—I should think I ought to try to do good sort of things too. In a little way, I mean. Only sometimes it seems no good trying—I only feel the wish sometimes, then I don't feel it at all."

Dorcas went to the little window and opened it, showing a rough wooden window-box from which grew up an ample green plant, strong and full of leaves, climbing its graceful way up a little trellis by the sides of the window sash and fluttering in the fresh spring evening wind, making an arbour of the dreary place.

"Look at this lovely thing," she said, drawing Clo to her side; "a year ago in your house, in that box of rough earth, I put a little seed, such a little seed, and left it there in the quiet sod. And God blessed the increase of it, and it grew to be the fair thing you see. So, little one, that gentle wish in your erring

human heart shall grow, and bloom, and bear flower."

When the girl left her friend that night, after an hour's talk, there was a new look in her eyes and less jerk in her manner. She spoke more kindly to tired Mark, and made his tea more carefully, cleared and tidied the sitting-room, and made things look brighter and cheerier. She even found him his slippers, and asked him about his doings, and begged to be taught something of the complicated political terms he and his friends used so readily. Mark glowed with pleasure at this changed Clo and spoke to her endearingly. It was the happiest evening they had ever had.

And in a little back bedroom a pale woman knelt by her narrow bed, saying, "Grant that an erring heart which loves this man too well—too well—may find its forgiveness in the work of helping the stumbling steps of this child, his wife. Forgiveness, Lord, for a wandering heart. Let me earn it by saving her—and serving him."

## CHAPTER VII

THE sweeping changes in the man's life were more dramatic than the subtle evolutions in the woman's. She came in for the lapping of the outer wavelets, the loose backwater of his more stormy stirrings. But he had actually to start afresh on a new career of hope and hard work, and very definite new experiences, and he found his days not long enough to crowd in the wonderful happenings, the great revolutionary upheavals of all the old barriers of his fettered, poverty-cursed life. The immense power of his talent had always been a sort of unquenchable genius for belief in his fellowmen, and, in the right sense, in himself. That belief alone had given him an influence and sway over others which had at times seemed almost magical. To some extent it is that faith in one's race that has given the sceptre to many of the greatest in the world. To quote an almost childish illustration Nelson used it when he told his men what England "expected" of them. It is a great thing to feel that a fine action is "expected" of you: it goes a long way towards making it an accomplished fact. John Wesley believed in men enough to spend himself in passionate appeals to them. Swift



sufficiently to rage against, to castigate, to lacerate them. Shakespeare thought they were worth being Shakespeare for, an immeasurable, infinite compliment. And that is why we love these men. No one loves John Knox, he thought too badly altogether of this kind : in his judgment it required so many pits and so much sulphur, that now it refuses him its heart, and not unnaturally.

Mark had that power in its intensity. It had nerved him and given him courage, and given him hope when everything else in his life was unspeakably depressing. It had given that wonderfully keen glow to his fine eyes, and carved and hewn his strong, virile face to what it was. And the very hardship and dreariness of his surroundings had brought it out in stronger relief ; since, if you are cast in a desert of material things, you are obliged to live all the more vigorously in some sweet abstraction of your own which forms a glowing Aladdin's palace in the wild waste of desolation.

But now all this was to be changed. Here at last were means to accomplish what hitherto had been hotly dreamed, violently prayed for, sometimes in the darkest moments despaired of. His fellows sometimes wondered a little contemptuously at the all-pervading atmosphere of Mark's religion. They had thought that enlisting on the side of "goodness" the one weak point in a really clever man. They could not know that to Mark God stood for the only powerful force beyond himself that he knew

or had come in contact with. He had never handled money. He had seen oppression, monopoly slave-driving, carried on by the power of money: and he had risen against these monsters, shrieking indignation in the name of God. It had been his one weapon, his one power.

But now, of course, another force had come into his hands—the force of wealth and influence, and the first few weeks of wielding it with his unaccustomed hand were weeks of intoxicating rapture. Of course there was the election fight to be got through, but that was joy to one whose trained sinews and iron nerves counted fights a glory: he had been imprisoned so long, with the fighting spirit wearing him away with inward tumult, that he was glad to plunge into the arena and lay about him mightily now that one had been opened up to him by Vade.

So it goes without saying that at this time he was very busy and absorbed—up early and out for hours on the business of his campaign, or locked up with the many deputations of men who now seemed to be eternally flooding into the little house.

Lord Henry proved to be more than a mere benefactor. He came forward and made himself an absolute friend to his man, and did it with all the tact and charm of which he was singularly capable. His admiration for Mark was very generous and very sincere: he saw in the stern, struggling enthusiast a latent talent for organisation and rule which won his highest feelings of respect and wonder. Mark had all

that he had not, even as he had what Mark had not and most wanted. They were complements, and as such felt a mutual attraction. Lord Henry was above all things a theorist, sometimes an idealist, but essentially critical and inactive in his methods of meeting life. Mark was a man of action, even violent action, decisive, ready, nothing if not putting his beliefs and emotions into actual working trim; to him a dream meant a call to immediate action. Lord Henry had money and no initiative; Mark had initiative to the degree of talent, and no money. Now they had met and combined forces they each realised suddenly what a power they were, welded hand-in-hand. They responded readily one to the other, and struck up a warm and genuine friendship from the very outset.

Mark's roughness, his untidy, ill-fitting garments, were to the half-mystic eye of Vade but the shell of a brilliant chrysalis, and rather proved him to be a real chrysalis than otherwise. Still they annoyed him and offended his inherent good taste, and he made a mental resolve to give the genius a hint about a tailor when he saw his opportunity.

You can be very original and yet take care of your hands and get shaved often enough, so Vade argued, and he lay in wait for the time when he could quite inoffensively communicate this axiom to Mark.

The occasion was not long in coming. One of Mark's future constituents-to-be, a very rabid little editor of a local paper, devoted to

scurrility and general attacks on the universe, had lately plunged violently for the subject of Hading's candidature, alleging with withering scorn that the printer of Minden Street would be a "gentleman" yet.

"Heavens! I hope not," said Mark.

"Oh! I don't know," said Lord Henry, who was smoking a cigarette in Mark's little office and discussing some future plans with him; "that isn't such a bad thing to be. If you must make a fool of yourself on this earth, that is certainly the nicest way to do it."

"But I do not intend to make a fool of myself," said Mark; "besides, I hate the word. Gentleman! It doesn't mean anything, it's a played-out, used-up, empty word."

"It means a few things," said his friend.

"What is a gentleman?" said Mark, growing enthusiastically belligerent, as he always did on such topics. "I ask you—what makes one?"

"Well," said Lord Henry, pulling his long chin and blinking his white eyelashes, "in the main, I suppose, it's a man who has a bath every day and pretends he thinks women more important than himself."

Mark stared at him contemptuously.

"Pretends?" he said. "Bah! you have condemned your gentleman in one word. An honest man—that is my idea—an honest man."

"Not if he doesn't look after his nails," drawled the benefactor, wisely. "Oh! no. Honesty without soap is one of the most painful things to encounter that I know. You can be



quite noble and yet shave. Carlyle did a lot of harm with *Sartor Resartus*. He made microby geniuses quite fashionable. To be really great you should soar so much above baths that you don't mind having 'em. It isn't really great, it's rather small, to be dependent on your rudeness and the badness of your tailor for your originality. My dear fellow, I assure you I speak truly."

"Ugh," said Mark, "it's the fop that I hate. Think of it—a man—a man" (he banged the little oilcloth-covered table till it jumped again), "with an immortal soul, living for finery, or smart coats, and scarf-pins, forsooth. I ask you, is it a noble ambition, a worthy one, a thing to live and die for?"

"No, it isn't," said Vade, serenely, "but your logic is rocky. I don't live and die for my breakfast, but I have to have it all the same. There are lots of things that aren't 'noble ambitions,' bother it, but ever so necessary for all that. Besides, you invented that fop. There isn't such a person. You reformers have always got such a lot of stock bogies. I resent that fop. I say he's a negation, except in a hairdresser's shop in the suburbs of Paris, and even then he isn't twenty, so he doesn't count as a man, 'noble' or otherwise. You shouldn't invent sinners to preach to. There are plenty of real ones, Heaven knows. But you all do it, all you good folks."

Mark stared at him in unaffected astonishment. He was unused to opponents who did

not lose their temper, and it non-plussed him for a moment to find one.

"I invent fops?" he said. "I know nothing of such men, nothing of that world, thank my stars. All I care about are these poor chaps about me here, and all I think about is what might be done for them—aye, and can be now, thank God! I've got but one ambition—to work out some future for these poor fellows; to better their conditions and lift them from their ignorant miseries." His voice shook with feeling as he said it, and he looked so earnest, and eager, and handsome, with the glow of it all in his dark face, that Vade glanced at him with eyes of genuine homage—the homage one man will pay to another's talent or goodness so generously and so well.

"Hear, hear!" he said quizzically, "well said. And I'm ready to follow you. Only do let us teach these dear good chaps to get washed more often. And I would suggest that we institute a better tailor's in these parts."

Hading, though ignorant of many things, was not stupid, and he thought over this conversation several times when going to and fro on the endless business matters that filled his days. His respect for Vade was deep and true, and it began to dawn upon him that there was some sense in his remarks about personal niceties. Once or twice in the little office when turning over books and papers he had been struck with the whiteness of Vade's hand and the contrast of it against his own rough and

shady paw. It had not affected him, save as another proof of the working-man's superiority. "White-handed gentlemen" had for years been one of his crack terms in speaking to dusky audiences, and it had never failed to rouse contemptuous applause. But, now that Vade had spoken so clearly his own views on the subject, Mark's mind began to be open to the possibility that there was something to be said for that side too.

"Did you mean me?" he said to Vade with his characteristic bluntness a few days later, "when you talked about soaping and shaving and tailors? Because I'm a rough man, and never professed to be anything else. But if there is anything I can do—" he paused uncertainly. He looked like a great rough dog talking to a canary, in his coarse shabby clothes as contrasted with the immaculate and waxen Vade.

It was really pathetic. The other thought so.

"Look here," he said, "you come and lunch at my club. I'll show you some awfully noble fellows who wear nice coats. You can do just as you like, and you're right to be rough and all that if it is more comfortable. Only your talent is going to get you on" (he did not add "and my money") "and you might just as well hold your own in those little things. You will have plenty of use for your fighting powers and your pugnacity, my dear fellow, without searching for it in your attire."

They went to one of Vade's clubs to lunch. He purposely chose a quiet hour, but of course there were one or two men about, and they stared a little from their tables at the rough companion he brought with him. Lord Henry was an oddity and cultivated oddities, but this was a rather more striking one than usual. The Turkey carpet got a little on Mark's nerves—it made his boots look so big, and not nearly black enough. He had never thought they were brownish before. There was quite a horrible amount of mirrors, and these reflected him on every side, in a way that somehow made his collar look grimy and too low in the neck. He had several shocks during the course of that lunch. He never knew before that if you did not shave for two days that it marked you off from other men as a sort of outcast. He never knew before that wearing no white cuffs below the edge of your coat sleeve made you want to hide your hands under the table. It had never even occurred to him that there was something mysteriously but infinitely be-littling in having a brown coat and grey trousers and blue waistcoat and a quantity of neck showing out of your collar. He rather irritably wished there weren't so many dishes and so many forks; and when the waiter held the vegetable dish he took it from him into his own hands and put it on the table with an angry bang.

He felt very cross. It was no use saying to himself that all this galled him because he was



"great," that he was above it, and it was trifling against a noble ambition, though that was what he tried to say in instinctive self-defence.

"You see that man over there?" said Vade, cautiously indicating a thin, grey-haired man at a distant table. He had a perfectly-fitting suit and wore a gardenia in his coat. He was deep in his paper.

"That dandy with the flower, you mean?" said Hading, irritably.

"Yes," said Vade, quietly, "that dandy. He held Burgher's Kop in the late war for six weeks with only twenty men and ten days' rations and fouled water. He nursed the enterics himself when he wasn't commanding, nursed 'em and washed 'em, by Jove, and wrote their letters for 'em, and starved himself for 'em. He had no food himself for the last three days of the siege. He held out and he won the day, but it's injured his health for good. But you can never screw a word of it from him. That dandy," he added softly.

Mark felt abashed. He looked several times at the thin-faced man in question. It was a new experience. There was no label on the hero. He was absolutely unconscious of attracting any attention whatever. He went on calmly with his lunch. Mark, who had always thought lions necessarily brandished their manes, sank a little into various reflections.

Other people were pointed out to him, other things discussed. They had a day of it. Vade

took him to the Strangers' Gallery at the House, where he heard, as luck would have it, an exciting debate. Mark listened and took it all in with intense avidity. Of course he had been before, but he had never been in the capacity of one who shortly hoped to join those distinguished ranks, and there is a world of difference between the two attitudes. Now he looked at the rows upon rows of men lounging, lolling, sprawling on the red velvet seats with the tense interest of a rival. The very tilt of some of the most awry of awry top hats had a significance for him now. He leaned forward with his hands clasped tightly together and his dark brows knitted, watching, watching with all the concentration of which he was capable. He looked very fine. Again Vade's eyes lighted upon him with a sort of wistful admiration; rough power appealed to him tremendously, and certainly here was real power if ever he read the signs.

Later on he proposed a play, but Mark had had enough of feeling himself a wild man of the woods turned loose in a drawing-room for one day, and insisted on going home, excusing himself, a little shamefacedly, as not being "presentable." This was the admission Vade had worked for, and he chuckled inwardly. He had won his point.

So that from that day a new sense of personal self-respect came into Mark's consciousness, and he proceeded to put himself into the hands of a fairly decent tailor from

that time forth. He clothed himself still in one sense as a "working man," but it was the costume of the traditional stage working-man, the Labour leader who gets interviewed, not quite the one he had originally dreamed himself to be. Still, clothes are only trifles, surface things he said, and there is really no difference between a neatly-cut dark-blue suit fitting a man well and a heterogeneous costume such as he had worn at Vade's lunch to his own supreme and unutterable confusion.

He got a little "chaffed" by his supporters, the men of his own class and world, for developing into a "swell," and the local papers entered into some really embarrassing personalities over this little reform of his. But he did not care a rap for local papers, and, popular as he was with his compeers, he had something in his manner that prevented the joke from being extended very far. They always had the underlying consciousness that he could snub them if he tried, very severely, and this conviction had of old proved a wonderful safeguard to him upon occasions, when his habit of religious quotation might have otherwise got him into serious comment and open scoffing. As the sage George Herbert has said, "Love thy neighbour but pull not down thy fence." Mark had always kept his fences in good repair.

The dignity that was natural to him, that was a part of his innermost character, went well with these improved sartorial conditions.

His wife was secretly struck by the rapid growth of her lord into a "real gentleman," or what impressed her as such, and began to show him an outward respect that had hitherto been somewhat wanting. She had secretly, since the brief bloom of courtship and early married life, very brief indeed in such households, held an opinion that Mark was a crank, made so entirely by that blighting process she called being "good." She had always cherished a dim sort of idea that if only he had not been so "good" he might have been more dressy, after her own ideal of that estate, and have cut an appearance at least worthy of a 'bus conductor on a Sunday afternoon—namely, a cotton tie and a buttonhole, and a bowler hat on one side. Her own life, in its blind way, had been one long strife against dreary conditions and material ugliness, whether caused by poverty or "goodness," or an amalgamation of both. And she had signified her dissatisfaction with these drab surroundings by donning artificial jewellery and cotton roses and cheap finery, with what relief to the angry, troubled spirit no moralist can hope to imagine or reach. For moralists always see the motives of others in an eclipse, the blackest shadow where there may perhaps be light behind. Any moralist you like to name would have seen in Clo's old love of finery a desire to catch admiration unworthily. And yet it had been her best protest against hideous conditions—the incipient instinct for reform and recreation. And a "sorrow's crown



of sorrows " to the majority of natures struggling in such darkness is its own stupidity and blindness ; it cannot tell you what it wants—it cannot even tell God. It only feels stifled and miserable in a stuffy, hideous place, and strives to get relief by grasping wildly at what beauty lies within its range of vision : the halfpenny bunch of half-dead violets smelling of yellow soap and bought at a street corner ; the gay "yat" with its tawdry endeavour after fashion ; the showy blouse, at a sweating price ; the mother-o'-pearl brooch set in mean gilt ; the tin earrings. It is very, very pathetic—God's eternal, nameless beauty to be represented by such things to any little struggling soul ! Yet to those reared in dun-coloured fogs and slums, with the screams of filthy children ringing in their ears, with the smell of fried fish in their nostrils, with nothing but poverty, hunger, ill-health, depression and downfall all around them like a great grey wall, even a hideous scarf or a blue glass vase with magenta enamel roses on it is an oasis of beauty in a desert, a treasure dropped from some vague distant city where there is untold beauty that has not entered into the heart of man ; and comes, in some wise, as a messenger.

Now Mark had made exactly the same protest, but on entirely opposite lines. From the deadly hideous materialism of his slum-bred life he had sought relief in the abstraction of noble effort. He had fought hotly with the deadening conditions of poverty and utter

squalor, not by adorning his body as the woman did, but by adorning his mind and ennobling his experience. He had done this now so long that he had reached a stage of spiritual and mental development when his fellow-men instinctively called him "master," some of those-fellow men his superiors, as in the case of Vade. Out of the slough of a hopeless material environment he had dragged himself, ennobled, strengthened and beautified to such an extent that hundreds were ready now to hold him up as their leader and model and hero. There is no power so magnetic as the fact of a man having given himself for his friends. Even the slums felt dimly that infinite triumph of the "greater love." And after their first thrill of astonishment it did not take long for Mark's busy advocates to fairly sweep in votes for this their own man, the "man of the People," the fellow-workman who had become so beloved and feared by all. Those were tremendous weeks, but they got through at last, and drew finally to the great election day and the ultimate triumph, yelled from a thousand rough throats, that Mark Hading was returned as Labour member. He never forgot that time and its long series of noisy triumphs. They were hot, blazing spring days when his glory was achieved, those days when the sun is scorching and pitiless, though pale in colour, and the wind bitter and cruel when you caught it suddenly at drab street corners whirling little rings of dry dust, and

sending pieces of waste-paper cutting against your face suddenly. The sort of weather when the unreasoning lady of the lower classes puts on a cotton top to her destruction, and the goddess of the upper world her thickest furs. When the silliest spring flowers in the parks creep out a little only to be withered, but the wise acacia closes up her hard little boughs against such fraudulent summer sunshine all the tighter and more firmly than in the wet but sincere winter. That day he was at it for hours in the close, crowded assembly rooms—hours of work and excitement and hot victory.

He came home the day after the poll, tired out but elated, for a wash and a few moments' breathing space before some festivities to be given in his honour by his triumphant constituents. It was still light though after six o'clock, and the sun was sinking in a mass of dull pea-soup-coloured murkiness above the dreary house-tops, looking like a poached egg. Bits of paper whirled about the little gutters, with orange peel, and near Mark's door a castaway shoe. He glanced at it with his shining eyes, this flushed, happy, elated hero, and thought half jokingly,—

"A cast-off shoe? Is that a good omen? Why, rather! They throw them at weddings. Foolish folks say they mean luck, and this day is more to me than a wedding day!"

His little palings were covered with boards holding election posters, big blue letters on a yellow ground, and similar announcements

filled all the narrow windows. Bits of these bills had been torn off by the wind or the neighbouring small rascals, and made the entrance and steps a chaos of untidy discomfort, in which the rude south-east wind was playing further havoc by adding orange peel and leaves to the quota. Mark stooped down mechanically and started clearing away some of the débris from his portal. He liked order, and especially now he had time to attend to such things. He gathered together the outstanding boards and carried them indoors on his strong, burly shoulder, calling merrily for his wife as he did so. When Clo appeared, her eyes shining with excitement still lingering from yesterday's news, he told her to help him remove all the bills pinned on to their little windows by letter wafers. This she did willingly in great enthusiasm, asking him questions as she tore off the now useless posters and thrust them into the waste-paper basket on his office floor. She wore her new grey stuff dress, bought out of the leavings of her charity to Jemima, in honour of yesterday's occasion, and her hair was very prettily dressed—as near as she could recollect in imitation of Lady Veronica's, gathered back into her neck and minus the "halo." At her breast she wore a little bunch of foreign violets. She had never looked so fresh and neat and worthy of her hard-working husband as at this moment. The spring and hope in her blood, and a faint pink colour suffused



her cheeks, which flushed still more as Mark repeated the story of his triumph again and again in answer to her questions.

"Now I must go, little woman," he said. "There's a big dinner—a banquet of some sort for me to-night at the Blue Boar—and I've got to get ready for it."

He had cleared away with her help all the window posters. He was just cramming the last one into the already gorged waste-paper basket when his eye caught a remaining hand-bill on the wall. He went up to it and tore it away from the pin that held it. Hanging next to it was a small common card bearing upon it a text in silver lettering surrounded by forget-me-nots. It said, "The Lord prosper thee."

"That thing too," he said, pulling the tawdry thing off its tin tacks, "it isn't wanted here."

His wife gave a little cry of dismay.

"Don't, Mark; that's Mrs Deane's present to you. She wouldn't take it away when she left this room. She said, 'I'll leave that if I may for your husband. I mean the blessing from my heart'—that's what she said. She did really."

But Mark dropped the little card into the heap of used-up election posters.

"Nonsense," he said, but good-humouredly enough. "I can't have Mrs Deane's texts in this office. This is a public office. It doesn't do. Only the other day Baxter—you know what a low-class, scoffing fellow he is—

was in here arguing about something or other. My clothes, or my luck, or something. As he was going out he caught sight of that text affair of yours and made a nasty remark. I don't like that sort of thing."

"What did he say?" said the girl, slowly picking the discarded blessing off the heap of rubbishy posters and looking at its tawdry beauties rather ruefully.

"He said—well, I don't like to repeat it. He said, 'The Lord prosper thee?—Umph! it is a lord that has prospered thee, eh? That's the way to get on, Hading, that's the dodge.' Of course there's nothing in it—I suppose he thought he was funny to bring in a joke about Vade's father's title—but I don't like to give such fellows a chance."

"Well, but you needn't throw it away," said his wife.

"It isn't wanted here."

Clo glanced at it again. "But—but it's a text," she said.

"Yes, I know," he answered.

"But— isn't it lucky?" she asked tentatively.

"Lucky?" he answered contemptuously, with fine contempt for all such mystic notions of life and its ulterior helps. "Rubbish. That for it's luck!" He took it from her hesitating hand and tore it in two, dropping the two pieces into the basket.

With a disappointed little cry she stooped and picked up the two silver and blue pieces.

"I should have liked it myself, Mark. It's pretty, and it's about God helping you on."

"Well, and He has helped me on," he said, with a tinge of impatience coming into his tone at the tiresome literalness of femininity, and kicking the paper-basket out of his way.

"Still, you might keep the card that says so," said the girl, in rather a puzzled voice. She took the two bits of card away into the parlour to find some gum to mend them. He left her sticking it with stamp paper from behind, with rather a knitted brow. He got his wash and his overcoat and went out to his first triumphal banquet, feeling the very pavement dance beneath the stepping of his freed and happy feet. In the gutter he passed the cast-off shoe. The uses of most things come to an end.

## CHAPTER VIII

THE torn text, fixed together a little unsteadily by strips of stamp paper, was now given a place of honour in the parlour. If Mrs Deane, in her constant visits to that now tidy and fairly cosy sanctum, noticed its removal from the outer office she said nothing at all. She was that most rare of angels—a good woman who knows how to hold her tongue. Instead of attacking Mark about the trifle she went on calmly with her gentle ministrations to his wife, realising in her own sweet, quiet fashion that after all symbolism means so much to women and so little to men : or so consoling herself for the banishment of her little offering.

Clo alluded to it when Dorcas first came in after its removal, bringing with her a fragrant bunch of wallflowers as a congratulatory offering. She spoke as though the thing were rather on her mind.

“I’m sorry, Dorcas. You see your text got torn, but I’ve mended it.” Her face went rather red, as though some worrying thought troubled her. But her mild-eyed friend took no notice, only remarking gently,—

“Oh, my dear, what a great power has been put into Mark’s hands. Let us both ask a blessing on his work.”



"Yes," said the girl, "if you like I will to-night when I go to bed."

When Mark came in a little later Dorcas said something similar to him in her modest fashion, her face in soft flush like a petal of apple blossom that has caught the sunrise.

"Oh, that's all right, Mrs Deane," said Mark, cheerfully, in answer to her congratulations, shaking her hand and sitting down to his supper; "I've done it now, haven't I? I told you what I could do if only I got the chance. I shall go ahead now, for there's lots to be done."

"Yes, yes," she said, looking at him affectionately, "it is a great work. How wonderful are the ways of Him who frees the captive longing and teaches the bound spirit to go forward and accomplish His behests in strength and power."

"Yes," he answered, helping himself to the salt, and rather clumsily overturning the little salt-cellar on to the tablecloth as he spoke. "And money and influence are wonderful things too, by George! I've seen just lately what they can do. I've got Lord Henry Vade to thank for my victory."

"Of course," she replied softly, "under God. He must be a very good man, Mark."

"Oh," he answered, "a gentleman, you know. The real old sort. As fine a fellow as I have ever seen."

"Mark says," put in Clo, who was waiting on her husband, dressed quite tidily and

prettily, "that he has clean shirts twice a day. Fancy that for a gentleman! He said so, didn't he, Mark?"

"Oh, that, and much more," said Mark, who was deep in a rather primitive salad, and eating somewhat fast because he had a meeting to attend and was limited as to time. "You should see his club. The way those fellows live—it's surprising! Such luxuries, and such elegance. I tell you I was astonished."

"Still, he uses his wealth to help the unhappy, doesn't he?" said the gentle Dorcas half to herself, as though working out some problem as to the innermost ethical value of living well at clubs and picking out the hopeful points from amongst the débris as farmers hunt for eggs in a hay-loft, or miners find gold in ore.

"Oh, I wasn't running him down," said Mark, busy with his meal; "I was telling Clo how superior he is even to what she thought. Those chaps do things that you and Clo can't even imagine, of course. I've been about with him a bit already and seen something of life—that life. I tell you it's grand."

"The grandest life of all," said Dorcas, slowly, while Clo stood listening with rapt interest to the two, "is the life spent like the Master's—going about doing good."

Clo nodded.

"Oh, of course," said Mark, restive over his cheese and salad and glancing at his watch; "but, as my friend says, you can do good

without going about talking about it at every turn. You see, Dorcas, I've got to deal with men—men of business and men of the world—and so I know what I'm talking about. You only get about amongst women and children and that sort of thing, and your way is just the thing for them. I don't say it isn't. I do it myself if I'm addressing women and children."

"Do it?" said Dorcas, gravely, "do what?" Her eyes were very searching. She had risen to go, and now laid her sweet offering of dim brown velvet wallflowers on the little table.

"Why, talk that way, and all that," he said, looking at her and then just slightly dropping his eyes a little quickly as he met hers; "you know what I mean."

"You cannot 'do' the love of the heart and not 'do' it at will, Mark," she answered; "it flows out of its own abundance like the sweetness of these flowers. Yours is a great talent; you are wonderfully blest; but that power is given to you to use for the Giver. I cannot see any other use for the power."

"Well," he said, rather testily, "am I not using it so? Aren't I doing all this for the poor chaps we've always been so sorry for and so anxious to help? You religious women are never satisfied. You're always sticking at trifles. Because to help them permanently at all I must put on a black coat and go amongst gentlemanly fellows in their clubs, and so on, you jib at once and hint that I'm some sort of a traitor. It's a bit too much."

"No, no," she said softly, "I did not say so. Forgive me, forgive me. I was overwhelmed, Mark, at the greatness of your power. I saw what you could do, I think, as I never saw it before. You will perhaps be a very great man, Mark. I know we think alike about the work that lies waiting to be done by all who have power—the work of doing good as one goes about. Why, your little Chloris thinks so too, and is doing good to poor bairnies every day." She smiled at Clo, who looked pleased but self-conscious. "But of you, Mark, we are so proud, and hope so much. You are so clever. We think—we know you will do the most good of all."

Mark was mollified.

"All right," he said, "I've got the power, never fear. It's a grand thing to have. And thank you for coming in and chatting to Clo. She'd be dull without you, with me away so much. Sorry I must go. Good-bye!" He was hurrying into his coat as he spoke, and after kissing Clo and shaking Mrs Deane by the hand, he ran off down the stairs in a great turmoil, whistling as he went.

Clo stood by the table mechanically picking up pinches of the spilt salt and throwing it over her left shoulder with great precision. Dorcas smiled at her affectionately, but her eyes looked wistful.

"Its unlucky," said Clo, sheepishly smiling too. "Mark spilt it, but I'm throwing it over my own shoulder to do away with the ill-luck."



"Nonsense," said her friend, kissing her good-night. "Judas spilt the salt when he betrayed his Lord. Be sure there is no ill luck but our own sins and faults. Good-night, my pretty precious."

Her cool face pressed Clo's and she was gone. The fragrance of the wallflowers filled the little room like a tangible effect of her kind presence. The girl picked up the little bunch of old-world country sweetness, and carefully arranged it in a common glass vase that had been bought originally from a grocer, full of marmalade. In the old days she would have flung the flowers anyhow into a jug or cup with a total disregard to their effect. Now, following out some dim train of aspiration after something alluring but undefined, called ladyhood, she carefully cut the tow binding the blossoms and put them in with some taste and lightness of touch, so that they distinctly added to the grace of the room.

Then she proceeded to wash up her supper dishes and put the room in order. She did it slowly, because as yet it was new to her to have any sort of housewifely routine, and partly because all her movements were quite naturally slow, except when she was cross, when they became jerky. The table cleared and the cloth cover rearranged on its small surface, she lighted a little lamp already trimmed and cleaned, and sat down to finish a piece of sewing that must be done before the morning. It was a small garment of cheap

flannelette, bought from one of the rolls outside the flashy draper's, and intended for one of the ragged "bairnies" of which Dorcas had spoken. It was only a common thing, cottony, pink and fluffy, but the child for whom it was intended was dwelling on the thought of possessing it by twelve o'clock to-morrow with an eagerness and pride that made it into a sort of fortune. Clo stitched away quickly—she could sew well, having learnt to do that perforce to provide herself with constant finery: and she knew the morning would be too much occupied to allow her to do a stitch after to-night. She thought of this fact with pride, real pride. It straightened her shoulders visibly. For in those circles, to do one's household shopping in the morning is a sign of immense social superiority. By some it is thought to be a token of wilful extravagance, the kind that in copy-books makes woeful want. Night shopping, after, at earliest, eight o'clock, is quite the custom in those parts, and they get things whole pennies cheaper by having them later and off stalls than by haughtily buying them from shops in the morning. In this life you must pay for everything worth having. If you will be a bloated aristocrat and buy the meat at the butcher's before it has gone bad enough to be twopence a pound cheaper, well then you must pay the price for it. Since Mark's elevation to the friendship of gentlemen and the candidature of his borough, the need of a change in these

matters had struck Clo, together with her other silent, shy little reforms. Saying nothing to Mark, she rearranged her domestic affairs on this basis, going out by ten o'clock with a string bag, out of which oranges rolled and fish poked silly, vacant heads when full. Thus she set herself to live up to her husband's dignity. She suffered a little upon first essaying this proud move, and slipped along to the high-road shops with some celerity and blushes, hoping no one would observe the new order of things till she herself got used to them. The few tradesmen who knew her were a little astonished at first, but these were very few, as she only usually dealt at stalls. They called her "lady," however, for the first time when she bought decent joints, and occasionally "Miss," because she looked so young and her manner had a newly-acquired and graceful shyness. She came back from the first of these trial trips with the head of a cod-fish looking belligerently out from the meshes of the string bag, as though defying the neighbours to chaff us for our rise in the world, in a manner giving him quite the appearance of a watch-dog held in leash. Some oranges and a packet of match-boxes also showed out of the corners. Like Mrs Gilpin, with the chaise pulled up a few doors away lest the folks "should say that she was proud," Clo rather dreaded the comments of Minden Street on this daring innovation. But possibly the fierce-looking cod intimidated them, for beyond two portly and

unwashed matrons gossiping away the morning hours at the street corner, making loud and virtuous remarks on some of us being too big for our places, and kicking down the ladders that lifted of us up as the sayin' is, she got home with her protecting fish (like a fresco of the angel-guarded Tobit carrying his piscatorial friend) in peace and safety.

This plan naturally made the home affairs run in a more orderly fashion. The dinner so bought was cooked and out of the way by the afternoon, and she could then dress herself neatly for the day as her husband had always wished her to do. Thus she had much more time to take a pride in her little house, and now that there was a new parlour carpet, and some brand-new oil-cloth on the small stairs, she really succeeded in making her little home something more worthy of the name. She was permitted the almost unimaginable dignity of a charwoman, for, as Mark said, "if all these 'swells' are coming here, we must be fit to receive them;" and so a brightness and polished appearance of the little gods became a daily condition, instead of the drab, dust-sodden appearance they had once possessed. We all say that it is wonderful what an interest in life will do for the most hopeless people. It ought not to be wonderful considering we may see signs of it every day, but I suppose it will always strike us afresh as miraculous though one of Nature's most undeviating laws—as workable as sunshine in the production of a



little struggling plant in a dark corner of ground, or the fascinating action of light drawing half-dead dusty ivy to wake from its sloth and poke eager little goldy-green shoots through the brown bricks of a dry old wall.

The dull, unwakened heart of this half-resentful Cockney girl woke at the call of a fresh hope and work as the rock-bound spring hears faintly the far wild call of the sea surging and singing and tossing into its cool and cave-bound dreams, and beats its little silver runnels against the lichened stones, and comes weltering and struggling through the encasing earth with its smell of fern roots and moss and infinite coolnesses, spluttering at its coming freedom and weakness but pushing on definitely, clearly, hopefully, till lower down it starts dashing over the stones in a baby torrent, in an infant stream, and finally, beating onward, flows to its beloved, the sea.

At present Clo's nearest approach to the sea of her dreams was the angry cod's head, but that was a small point gained. Her now tidy little home, with its wallflowers in a glass vase, her daily work for the children, her unbounded admiration for the powers of her husband, were having their effect upon her face. The sulky look at its worst was slipping away, leaving only a gravity and shy reserve that was not unattractive. The earlier hours and more orderly life and daintier habits were having their effect on her health, and her skin certainly looked clearer and better, while into

her wide-apart green eyes had come an interested, inquiring look, which was certainly more becoming than the listless semi-sowl of the old days. Her better-groomed hair, in its attempt to simulate the graceful smooth waves of Veronica's Kauffmann coiffure, now showed to advantage for the first time, and was distinctly pretty and uncommon. It does not take long for a London girl who learns to respect herself to arrange matters to give the effect of prettiness. They have a marvellous talent in that direction when they really give their minds to it. Those who have worked amongst the class in question can testify to the instinctive talent for suiting themselves that such seem to possess as a birthright : and when this talent is allied to a sincere desire to imitate the best they know in a class above them the rapidity and certainty of their judgment is really marked. London is full of such sartorial geniuses, a fact which makes the unthinking say that the London lower middle-class girl is prettier than the much-vaunted country maid, in spite of the latter's complexion. That is a matter open to doubt. But the former has intelligence and instinctive artistic judgment, and the latter, as a rule, has not. She likes her heavy boots, her short serge skirts, her hideous hats, her lumpy, unintelligent hair-dressing approved of by the parish ; she does not see that they are at all frightful until she comes to London to "do" the Academy, and then she sometimes dimly realises that

there is a world that has not got mackintoshes glued to its arm, and hair done at the back of the head like a penny bun that has been sat upon.

They had an old harmonium in the Minden Street house, a battered, half-dumb old veteran in a light wood cover, that had once belonged to Clo's father—a poor old printer with dim dreams of education. The girl had "learnt music" at the Board School after Board School fashion, that is to say she could thump "Killarney" arranged in fantasia form with practically the same chords in the bass from start to finish. She also knew "'Way down upon the Swanee River" with variations, the latter occurring only in the treble, and even then being sometimes unintentional. But she had long cast aside this rudimentary art, having no piano and, up to the present, no wish to shine except as a beauty modelled on the cigar-box ideal. But now she opened the creaking instrument and sat herself down to it, putting her feet cautiously on the stiff old blowers. At first the thing only grunted, then when she pressed hard with her fingers it wheezed, then, as if under real protest, began to squeak.

She was a little upset by the sounds it brought forth, but she persisted until a few chords were really developed bearing some faint resemblance to a tune. They were not quite equal to the "Lost Chord," in fact, their only resemblance lay in the fact that they were very lost indeed, owing to several notes being

hopelessly dumb, but they roused a faint hope of eventual success in the girl's heart. She went to the cupboard on the stairs and raked out some very dusty old sheets of music, pirated editions of the compositions before alluded to, which had belonged to her in her Board School days. Carrying these back in triumph she proceeded to play "The Swanee River," with, it must be confessed, even more variations than of old, the latter greatly assisted in "infinite variety" by dumb or asthmatical keys. She was not very pleased. Still, one joy was hers. She certainly remembered what she called "her notes." This was a triumph at anyrate. She had not entirely lost her little accomplishment. She would try to practise now. It would please Mark. Some instinct told her that it would please Mark better if she practised when he was out; but that would be quite easy, his time being now so entirely taken up. Nevertheless, he came in unexpectedly one evening when, her household and self-set charitable duties over, she sat at the wheezy instrument with knitted brow, trying to evolve one of Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words" from its snarling depths. Unlike the song, Mark was by no means without words on this occasion: he found quite a torrent. Still, he laughed, and was kind enough, and when she, looking rather snubbed, wistfully closed the instrument, said, "Show us your music. What is the thing?" she told him shamefacedly.



"Can you play all these?" he said, indicating the heap of pieces with some astonishment.

"Yes," she replied, "most of them. I'm out of practice and I was trying to look them up. That was all."

"What made you do that? I've never heard you even try all the time we've been married."

"Well," she said slowly, fingering the battered music folios, "Dorcas says ladies know music and French, and do good to—to others. And don't ever go to music-halls. And don't ever over-dress. I thought I'd begin with the music."

He looked at her amusedly, pulling at his pipe, which he had lighted. He had sat down by the fire.

"Oh, come, you began with some of the works of charity first, didn't you? I heard something about what you did for those miserable brats of Ball's. Then you don't over-dress—not now. You look as neat as may be in that blue serge. That sort of thing shows off your figure well, and you look quite the thing in it. You haven't been to a music-hall either for months now. Absolutely I see nothing left for you to learn but the French."

She shook her head several times but looked pleased for all that.

"Would you like some lessons in your music?" he said. "I met that poor chap Fortescue the other day. He asked me to remember him if I heard of any likely pupils."

He always taught the piano well, though he thinks he's a composer and wastes his time trying his hand at that game. He's very hard up as usual. You can have a term from him if you like."

She jumped at the idea. She would like it. So she was started at once into lessons from Fortescue, lessons which took her almost daily to the comparatively affluent neighbourhood of the Vauxhall Bridge Road, where Fortescue lived in rooms. Her teacher was a tall, thin, mild-eyed man of fifty, with dejected grey hair and a limp moustache: the joke against him was that he called himself a gentleman and said he came of a very ancient family; a very good joke to a certain type of mind, because he was obviously down at heel and the elbows of his blue coat were shiny. But he did, nevertheless, come of a good family. He was himself an Oxford man, and he was the last, the very last, of a line of gallant gentlemen who had once ruled their mighty acres with a vigorous hand. In this he spoke the truth: it was about the only subject upon which he did so, by-the-bye, and as a consequence it was always taken by his friends to be a lie. He had been an organist at a provincial cathedral, but his mania for compositions that an ignorant world forever left without recognition, together with a taste for imbibing, had brought him down to the post of hack teacher and music copyist he now occupied.

In Mrs Hading he found a quiet and rather

stolidly-persevering pupil, an awe-stricken admirer of those compositions which had been his ruin, and a blessed little source of income. So they became friends.

When Clo first saw her teacher he came forward from the shadows of his shabby room and bowed very low over her hand, quite naturally. At first she thought he was "foreign." But she soon corrected her mistake. Her teacher spoke the most perfect English with an exceedingly refined accent, and though his blue coat was too short in the sleeves and appeared to have been made for somebody else, and his boots had little splits at the sides, his hands were beautiful and scrupulously kept, and his ways were of the gentlest. Long, long in the dim past there had been a Fortescue ancestor who had played a striped lute in a sunbeam-haunted courtyard with just such exquisite hands, and who had spoken in just such inflections, and the dust and the faded finery of the lodgings in Vauxhall could not quite obscure these graces. Clo at least recognised them for what they were really worth, in some dim way. She went home and said to Mark,—

"Mr Fortescue really is a gentleman."

"He's a good teacher," said Mark, "but, poor chap, he's got little chance of the other thing."

"Oh, I didn't speak of chances," said Clo; "I mean he can't help being it. He talks like—like Lord Vade."

"Lord *Henry* Vade, you should say," put in Mark. "I've told you that before. You shouldn't say Lord Vade. It gives you away as being so ignorant of the right things to know. I'm a man of the people myself—I care nothing for your aristocrats, not I—but I like things called by their right names." But he teased her about her belief in Fortescue's gentility, which he regarded as chimerical.

Later on Clo gave him a sample of her teacher's success with her music, which so pleased Mark that he brought out some cigarettes that Vade had given him, and told her to give them to Fortescue as a present from himself. The cigarettes were in a pretty box. This she did. Poor Fortescue was so unaffectedly delighted at the small attention, and eyed the things so eagerly during the lesson, that at its conclusion Clo begged him to light one. She had an idea she ought to.

There are different fashions in the smoking of cigarettes, of course. Sometimes for whole decades you don't light them at all, sometimes you never remove them from your mouth till they are smoked, and so on indefinitely. But in Fortescue's young days (the "Sixties") you puffed at them very hard, and alternately with this pulled them out of your mouth and held them away from you with a great flourish high up in the air, and again puffed them, and so on. That mode belonged to the doggish fashion of wearing your hat on one side and calling girls "gals," and "sporting" lavender kids. In



the cloud of that tobacco smoke (they were very good cigarettes) poor Fortescue perhaps saw a dream of some such bygone gaieties—a coach and four to the Grand at Brighton: champagne, chignons and arch women—for he tossed off his little weed with flourish after flourish till Clo, much impressed, decided to tell Mark about it and see if he could not be persuaded to adopt such a course with his pipe. She was so sure it was the proper thing.

This incident took place at the conclusion of one of her lessons. In the rush of her genuine admiration of his manners she confided a little of her ambitions to Fortescue, telling him a little haltingly why she was taking the music lessons. Fortescue, who had hitherto been mainly absorbed in the fact that he was taking the money, became interested at once in this project, praised her effort very kindly, and offered magnanimously to correct her occasionally in her speech.

"I thought I spoke right," she said, a little crestfallen at this new stumbling-block.

"Rightly," said Fortescue, gently. "In one sense you are perfect, my dear young madam, as you are. But if you do not wish—?"

"Oh, no, do please tell me if I go wrong," she answered. And he agreed. So the broken-down music-teacher became also the instructor in polite speech and deportment, and Clo began to learn more than "Killarney" with variations at his courteous hands. She was a born imitator, with the additional advantage of being blindly

tenacious of whatever she willingly took up. It was this that made her worth teaching. In two months she had practically corrected the faults of her speech, had lost, or was rapidly losing, her Cockney twang, and had learned the following elegancies :—"how to enter a room for a morning call," "how to greet an equal upon introduction," "how to take tea as a lady should," and so on, from the repertoire of her gallant teacher. They were little bygone courtesies that poor Fortescue taught, but they were genuine enough, and had their root from whence all true courtesy springs—a kindly heart. Their watch-words were dignity and deference, two very graceful things though a little elbowed out of the way to-day by their two loathsome opposites. They went in for fine little subtleties, such as the ceremonious reverence for age, the observance of small kindnesses, modesty and tact. Fortescue had out-of-date ideas on refinement: he advised the repressing of the voice from a shriek to a modulated tone; he counselled a walk instead of a self-confident swagger; he greatly discountenanced rude staring; he thought that a woman who looked sheer at another woman's dress with eyes like motor lamps was impudence personified, and said so.

"Still," he remarked sadly, "it is quite usual. You must expect to encounter it. Some day she will go out of fashion and modify herself. But at present impertinent curiosity does not meet with the snubs it should."

People hurrying along the Vauxhall Bridge Road those fine spring evenings, meeting a slip of a girl with earnest green eyes carrying a music-portfolio and apparently lost in thought, would have defined her possibly as a Polytechnic student or a rather fine-looking dress-maker's assistant. She would hardly have been distinguished from hundreds of other pale, handsome London girls of the struggling classes, except that she was fair and they are generally dark-haired, and she was perhaps a little taller than the average. They would never have thought that she was working, as a tiny beaver works at his pathetic, laborious little townships, at a small fairy structure of her own, made of quite as poor materials, and quite as liable to be rudely swept away by torrent, storm or tempest, except that there is a wide, protecting power that guards and shelters such little blind city-makers.

## CHAPTER IX

THREE weeks after the foregoing events, weeks fraught with passionate interest to one small group of people at least, Lady Listower was driving home through the Park in no happy mood. It was a glorious April day, one of the first really sunshiny days after a long and foggy winter, and though early in the year there was quite a small crowd of carriages and silent electric motor broughams spinning along the familiar bistre-coloured way. The sun glanced in gaily among the thin stems of the trees, still "birth-bare," as Rossetti has called it, with little gummy points and greenish tips just beginning to appear; and the snowdrops still shone pure and pale in the grass, and the orange and purple flowers of the crocuses stood up erect in the greenness like an army of gorgeous knights arrayed for the jousts in a Golden Age of chivalry.

Lady Listower wore furs and a toque of Parma violets, and should have looked well in spite of the immensity of the black toupee and a certain purpling of her face in the keen spring wind; but she looked cross and haughty, and when she did this she was not beautiful. Neither, indeed, would Venus have been:



nevertheless, it is a favourite mode. Ill-humour brought out in Lady Listower just sufficient resemblance to a nasty-tempered parrot to make it advisable for her to keep her face in control : for she could smile very nicely, yet rarely would.

There were several very pretty women about that afternoon. Lady Listower bowed to two or three and cut four as part of her daily duty, and stared hard at another who waved to her, a young and sufficiently handsome woman who had just gone into mourning and had consequently dyed her hair red by way of contrast, with no warning to her neighbours, with the result that one at least did not know her for the moment. Whereupon she tossed her newly-tinted head and screwed up her nose and said, "I hate that horrid old Listower with her frowsy old wig. Let her go in for her old bird crusades—what is it?—Protection of Song-birds?—and keep out of my way. No wonder she's bird mad—her head's a regular crow's nest."

But Lady Listower did not hear. By the Achilles Statue she met Henry, and suddenly her dull, wrinkled, violet face brightened all over, like a flash of sunshine. Henry came up at once with cheerfulness—he was a dutiful boy in quite small matters—and said without a blush,—

"Mamma dear!"

"My dearest boy," she answered, leaning out and holding his hands, "how long it is, how very, very long, since you have been to see your old mother. Where *have* you been?"

He laughed. "Good Heavens, where haven't I been? I've had no sleep for weeks—don't I look it? But you heard, of course? I got him through—he's in."

"The rabbit-skin man?" said her ladyship, looking fondly into his eyes. "I heard something—yes. So he got in? Where are you going?"

"Nowhere, for once," he answered.

"Come to see me," she said.

"I was coming to see you."

He said this with great sweetness, though it was entirely untrue. He had come from his club and was taking a breath of air before going down to the House after his eternal hobby. But he wanted his mother's help about something and here was a chance to get it.

"Come back with me at once, my angel," she answered rapturously. The angel, very pinched about the waist, got in and sat beside her. Her plain face was changed utterly by the effulgence of her expression, the wonderful mystery we call the "mother look." Between the rouged face then and the Madonna purity of Dorcas Deane's, could they have been put side by side, there was now a strong resemblance. No wonder Henry thought his mother "not a bad-looking woman," and was rather proud of her than otherwise. He only saw her when her soul was in her eyes.

"Mother, I want you to help me," he said at once. Angels can be very prompt.

"What is it? Say, and it is done," she answered.

"I want you to receive the rabbit-skin man," he said, "and his wife."

"Receive them, dear? How?" she asked gently. "In their donkey-cart?"

"You see," said Henry, "they haven't got a donkey. They would have to come by train, or tram, or something. But they would behave quite quietly, really. All I want you to do is to be nice to them for about half an hour—show them what a typical great lady at home can be like. Won't you?"

This went home.

"Certainly—when?"

"Any time. To-morrow?"

"Yes, I can arrange that for *you*, dear. You know that. What will they do? Shall I offer beer?"

"Oh, no, dear. Not even whelks. Tea would do."

"Ah, tea—tea. I must remember. Do they wear pearl buttons?"

"I don't think so," said Henry, knitting his brows as if trying to recollect; adding eagerly, "They wash their hands—at least he does. I saw him."

"How interesting," said Lady Listower; adding, "I suppose they are quite safe? Wouldn't burgle, or pickpocket, or anything? I'd better warn James to keep an eye on them in the hall."

"Oh! I think not, dearest. You see they

are not in actual want or that sort of thing. I've seen to that. All I want you to help me in is to teach the man to wake up to some sense of the world he lives in—to see something of the people not of his immediate world."

"I see. You mean, as he is eventually to abolish the House of Lords he may as well have a look at their furniture first to see what he will take himself?"

"No, it isn't quite that. You see, clever and brilliant as he is—he—he's such a *Christian*."

"And you want me to teach him a little of the other side."

"No, dear. Only that Christianity is possible apart from black kid gloves and shiny boots."

"I see. And is his wife a Christian? You study character so closely—you must know."

"No, I don't think so. She's rather flighty or something, I hear. She jibs. She is vulgar, and all that, of course; that goes without saying. But she's rather a drag, or she will be rather a drag, upon him unless someone shows her the 'better part' soon. I've got that man at heart, mother. I mean to make him great. I don't want it all spoiled by a little Cockney cat."

"They ought to be very grateful, sweet," she answered, as she stepped out of the carriage and went indoors, followed by the mincing angel, more than ever resembling Philip of Spain after the manner of Velasquez, with his light blue eyes like a candle flame.

In the smaller drawing-room they found



Vera just returned from Princes' with two men, pouring out tea and laughing gaily. Vera was a downy impression of immense white furs and a Paris hat like a cake resting on her nose; she was very neat and taut about the feet, and absurdly over-scented with something like prayer books and bird seed combined—a new Russian perfume then in vogue. Lady Listower, in addressing her and her friends, had completely got back the pug expression, and returned to her ancient truculence of manner as by the passing of a magician's wand. The two men, upon the entrance of this stern vision, fell into a feeble attempt at wisdom, or rather graver folly than that with which they had regaled the lively Vera, but Lady Listower remained obdurate. Consequently, after a decent interval, the pair departed with many entirely insincere protestations of flippant sorrow for other appointments.

"Well," said Veronica to Henry, "I hope you are satisfied with your tiresome man—I forget his name. He got in, didn't he? Good for you. Now, who else will you take up?"

"His wife," said Vade, cheerfully, "that is the next business."

"That little Cockney person who saved me from a scene, do you mean? How really funny! I should advise a shampoo first; then a grammar book."

"No," said Henry, "you can't begin with the surface. I shall put before her first the ideal of an English lady."

"How dull," said Vera. "What is that?"

"Mother," he answered with his eyelids lowered.

"Oh—oh—oh!" laughed Vera, "that fearful person and mother! Is she really coming here? When?"

"To-morrow."

"Oh! I must be in. I must see the play. What a ridiculous thing! I shall watch to see her slip on the parquet and bite her bread and butter. Mother *is* charitable. Costers to tea! What next?"

When the following afternoon arrived, Lord Henry appeared with his *protégé* and entered his mother's sanctum at the time named. This was a vast white apartment, with yellow panels, on which were poppies and daisies and raised golden corn. It was a very gaudy apartment, full of gold chairs, and tables covered with poppy-coloured damask, off which you slid as continually as off Mrs Tombs's black horse-hair, unless you kept your mind well on the matter. But it had what Mrs Tombs's had not—some easy lounges and billowy seats that one could really sit on and lounge on, inviting with soft primrose cushions and white daintinesses.

Lady Listower herself, stately in pure white fine cloth and chiffon, with a few mauve jewelled brooches and lace pins among her fluffinesses, came forward to greet the "Coters," as their names were announced, with an unusual geniality thrown into the Rochmane belligerence.

She saw a well-dressed man with a face of startling interest and character come forward to greet her quite at his ease; this to her amazement, though she did not show it. This, then, was Mark Hading. But the wife took her a little more by surprise. For though plainly dressed in a grey stuff walking dress and a dark, plain, claret-coloured hat, a colour which suited her remarkably, she struck no note of vulgarity of any kind. She was strangely metamorphosed, considering her dress was as usual, save that her gloves and boots were new. The necklace of pearls with the ecstatic motto "ten three" was gone forever, and in its place was a neat stock. Gone forever, too, was the lumpy, untidy "halo," and the abundant hair was simply done in a knot at the back of the neck, its soft pale brown or honey colour being now for the first time apparent. Her naturally pale face was a little paler as she entered, owing to her shyness; but her large, deep-set, aquamarine green eyes, under the rather dark brows, shone out of its firm contour with great beauty, and the natural expression of reticence, defiance, sulks, what you will, which above all things might have stamped her of coster blood, passed easily for stately reserve when combined with her erect walk, good features and neat dress.

She replied with simplicity to Lady Listower's greeting, and with that wonderful self-possession and dignity of the Cockney girl upon occasions, she quite calmly took the seat offered

her, and did not, as Vera had predicted, slide on the parquet. So much for Fortescue.

Lady Listower talked rather fluently for some minutes to give her visitors a chance to get used to their surroundings. She really pitied them, and wished to relieve their excess of embarrassment. Hading watched her very closely, she thought—he seemed to be studying her; and that he might see a great lady at home to full advantage she addressed herself to him with the best charm of which she was capable. This was comparatively easy, dear Henry being in the room. She worked very hard for his sake.

Then tea was brought in, followed by Vera, in a pearl-coloured soft satin tea-gown embroidered in tiny festooned roses, an Empire garment from Liberty's, with long pink chiffon sleeves. Her dark brown hair dressed high with a great comb, *à la* Empire. She nodded to them all coldly, and then, frankly curious, she sat and stared at Clo from a lounge into which she had apparently fallen on entrance; but Clo, inured by Mrs Trinder, took her tea with her own accustomed stolidity and continued to answer Lady Listower's occasional questions with a simplicity in itself well-bred because unstudied.

"Our house," she was heard to say in answer to Lady Listower's kindly inquiry about her husband's work and home, "is a very small one—too small for you to imagine, I suppose. We had a lodger, but we have had to get rid of her to



allow my husband more space for his new business affairs."

"How very interesting," said Lady Listower, gravely, as though lodgers were a special study or cult that it would be a new idea to take up, especially in a state of evacuation. As a matter of fact she was not too clear what they were. She thought vaguely that they were generally medical students, if they were not children recovering from the measles, with a train of nurses; or in very remote East-End places, coiners, dressed in their shirt-sleeves, who cooked things in frying-pans over meagre but very lurid fires. This she had got from sensational literature, for which she had a violent avidity. She thought it a pity Clo had got rid of hers; he added so much to the local colour and was so vividly picturesque, doubtless, especially if of the coiner variety. So she said, "How really interesting," in a meditative voice. Clo did not think it was, however.

"No," she said simply, "it isn't indeed—it's very dull. Especially if they play the cornet, or don't pay; but ours was different, a religious woman. Not that they pay—the religious ones—in another sense, you know. They're usually so poor."

She looked frankly into Lady Listower's eyes with an innocence and confidence that no lessons in deportment could hope to give. Lady Listower's blue blood here showed up true to itself—she did not smile. Chivalry was of her veins. A weak thing confided in her,

she could not trample on it. Gravely she said, "Yes, I suppose they are. Poor dear things! But you know how *nice* of them. How biblical. I like great characters." She glanced at Hading. "Isn't your husband a great character? He looks it. Such a fine head—like those tiresome old Puritans and people who killed Charles the First. Horrid old things, you know, but very good. A saint rampant, and all that."

Clo answered that she thought that he was very good and very great. She knew she was not worthy of him, and this large, grave, grey-eyed great lady, who was dressed like a queen and who spoke so nicely, must have seen it, so she said so, quite calmly.

"Do you know," answered her ladyship, smiling as one would to a child, or as she would to dear Henry, "I am going to make him talk to me and see!"

Hading came over to her, and they had a long talk, or rather he did, for he talked extremely well and with remarkable fluency. She let him do so because she was studying him, but even she was astonished at his brilliance, while Veronica openly drew nearer to listen to its magic, taken out of her critical mood completely.

When Mark and his wife had gone Henry asked his mother what she thought of him.

"A clever person," she answered; "he will certainly get on."

Then Henry said, "You can have no opinion of his wife: those people's women are so impossible."

His mother paused. She looked into her private pigeon-holes of classification and hesitated, because Henry and Vera awaited her words and she wanted to be true to herself and to them both. Lady Listower called everybody who was not in the Peerage "poor dear souls," and even some who were in it "quite respectable." The very poor whom you helped with blankets and tea were "those sad creatures in the East," and the rest of the world "persons" qualified according to deserts as "terrible" or "honest"; for instance, people you just couldn't invite to dinner were "terrible persons," and people you only just could were "honest persons."

But Clo was a new sort. In a way she swayed between "a sad creature in the East" (only you really couldn't give her blankets) and a "terrible person" (only of course she did not even dream of an invitation to dinner). Suddenly an inspiration came to that daughter of a line of Dukes.

"She is an original soul," she said gravely.

Then Henry knew his hobby was safe. He had only heard that term applied by his mother once before, and that was to a half-mad, but fascinating ex-Empress to whom she had done a service when Lord Listower was Ambassador to a great Continental centre. Clo had been signally honoured.

## CHAPTER X

As the months went by the astonishing success of the new Labour member became definitely assured.

The General Election had been a sharp fight of fluctuating possibility as to issues, but had terminated in the return of the Opposition by a shadowy majority. Crawshay's cousins, thrown out of office at last, lay about in a state of exhaustion. One wrote a biography while in this condition, consisting mainly of long extracts from the *Times* of the 'Sixties and 'Seventies referring to the public speeches of the subject of the memoir, a quite ghostly person from a biographical point of view, whose name (that of a distinguished statesman) only occurred at rare and necessary intervals in the work, and whose personality never once. Another cousin turned Wesleyan, or said he was going to do and didn't, which does nearly as well for interviewers; and another made a speech in the Midlands which fizzled and died out like a damp rocket on the fifth of November. While the Patent Food one founded a Boudoir League, to keep his party together by means of feminine influence, but unfortunately chose such an ugly Duchess to head it that it never



“caught” at all, and wound up its affairs in bridge and scandal; in which pursuits even the ugly Duchess basely joined. So the Patent Food cousin dabbled in Spiritualism in sheer disgust, and revenged himself on Femininity by refusing to marry any one of its units and giving out dark hints to the cheaper Press world of the individual ladies who had to suffer that humiliation. Crawshay, exhilarated by the glorious feeling that he had helped to bring about this glad consummation, plunged hotly into social life and sports, and metaphorically snapped his fingers with real glee. It was a pleasure to see him; and to hear him bluster his rude rejoicing an absolute tonic.

But Hading's chance had come, and he was the last man to make a hash of it at this stage. His maiden speech, when the time came, was a revelation, and turned all eyes upon him. One journalist writing ecstatically to an important daily called it “an epoch-making” speech: and for once that weary old phrase was true, for indeed it was from the point of view of the speaker's political experience. From that he went on steadily. He seemed to be without fear or nervousness of any kind; far from finding his new duties a “strain,” as the year went on he obviously improved in health and vigour, and his long, firmly-drawn face grew more powerful in its magnetism as his blood improved, and a brown and healthy “fitness” took the place of his once too white complexion. Looks go a much longer way in the making of

even a man's life than those who do not possess them will ever admit. But they must be appropriate in their picturesqueness to suit the English. You may be ever such a handsome Prime Minister, but if you look like a Guardsman it will profit you nothing: you must look like a Prime Minister, and then, even with the soul of a currant bun, all will be well. Gladstone, with the face of a mediæval bishop, could even dictate to Canterbury; while D'Israeli, who looked like a perfectly charming Eastern conjurer, will to the end of time rank with performing mountebanks in many cloudy minds.

Mark's face was dramatically that of the earnest man of the people, the Daniel come to judgment of the stage: and the fact that he had not a stubbly beard, in common with so many of his political brethren, was greatly in his favour, and helped to make his striking dark features more striking still. Dante faded in it just a little, and Napoleon became more apparent as his health improved: but his eloquence and marvellous flow of language notably increased.

His practical common-sense, combined with his power of language, his absolute courtesy and perfect command of his temper in public, were a unique combination, joined as they were to a personal knowledge of the subject of Labour questions, and sufficient learning of the "book" order to enable him to hold his own with anyone short of specialists. His

opponents, recognising a foe worthy of the name, tackled him hotly: and his celebrity grew with a rapidity by no means usual to those who do not advertise.

Some wild Bills were presented at the Spring Session from both sides of the House. One, a Government measure, proposed to pull down all the historic houses in London and rebuild them as they ought to have been: afterwards converting them into free clubs for the working-man, furnished with billiards, spittoons and other amusements.

Another demanded the absolute abolition of the Butchering Trade, and had amongst its clauses one commanding all butchers to subscribe so much a head towards a fund for maintaining themselves when beggared. This measure was brought forward by persons who had caught hold of the new idea that we eat too much; but it was bitterly attacked by the Anti-Vivisectionists and others, on the grounds that the butchers had no right to compensation at all, being lost creatures and the sole causes of appendicitis and other ills. The logic of the objection took long to propound and was the cause of many heated meetings and bitter animosities. It will live in English history.

Amongst a host of others too numerous and tedious to mention, Hading had the temerity to introduce one of his own. It was called the Child Citizen Bill, for the feeding and clothing of children of our poor at the day schools, and the institution of County Council clubs for

such of those who are nightly compelled, by the misery and narrowness of their homes, to loiter in the streets learning the vice which afterwards makes them criminals. At these clubs were proposed organised lectures on citizenship, made easy to suit the young hearers: healthy games and exercises: instruction in various useful trades and crafts: and general enlightenment and social uplifting.

At these centres an efficient staff of monitors was to be maintained for the preservation of discipline; but the lecturers were to be, like the hospital physicians, unremunerated. Roughly, these were its points, but its *raison d'être* was the nurturing up from childhood of steady citizens. In a passionate speech, which took his hearers by storm, he enumerated the want of some such means of a better early training for the incipient pauper citizen of London.

He pointed out the fact that the child of the very poor is at six years old a conscious thing with decided views and almost immovable habits, and equal to the better class of ten or twelve in knowledge of the world, if not more than equal. By the time it leaves school (at fourteen years) it is grown up to all intents and purposes and can no longer be greatly influenced by the most earnest efforts of Church institutions, clubs, etc., or those on purely non-sectarial but philanthropic lines, of which there were many in existence. He said, to put it briefly, that the State which wanted good, law-abiding citizens and townsmen must make them.



If the conditions of trade, of labour, of property, etc., were such that millions of children were doomed every year to be born into surroundings not fit for the housing of pigs, to be brought up breathing the air of these surroundings, and to mature finally as ignorant, diseased epitomes of them, as criminals, wastrels and idiots, if this was so, then the State must step in and provide the home influence, the ideals, the early training that these conditions made impossible. Frantic as the scheme sounded, he had his figures to hand. He went into the annual expenditure by the State on criminals, adult and children: on prisons, reformatories and houses of correction: again on idiot asylums, lunatic asylums, workhouses and refuges. Also the expenditure by the Churches of all denominations on similar institutions—such as clubs, guilds, bands of hope, happy evenings, and rescue work. He estimated that half this outlay was unnecessary, that half of it, devoted to prevention instead of to the cure, would save the other half in the space of ten or fifteen years.

He is not to be defended in this crude proposition, but he is to be admired for meaning it heartily, and at least himself holding a noble vision of a future of slum children made honest, clear-eyed, healthy, useful and intelligent directly they are old enough to toddle; and growing up to self-respecting, clean, law-abiding men and women.

The subject was sufficiently sentimental to

create a sensation. All people think alike about children nowadays, or think they do: at any-rate, all theoretically want them to be happy. And this Bill got hold of the attention of women, women in high places, and was consequently talked about considerably. Mark's photograph appearing in some of the papers as the new apostle of children also did its work, and Lord Henry was asked to show people the original, and to trot him out for criticism as something new. This was done, and Mark got on flourishingly in a circle he otherwise could not have entered by hook or by crook. He lunched, dined and talked with the great in their own haunts, with one result, that his manners, always good, now definitely improved and he acquired a polish and charm quite irresistible.

It naturally followed that he saw less and less of Clo, who could not be supposed to accompany him in all these adventures. Time hung a little heavily on her hands, and just occasionally the thought of it pricked him like a thorn under the skin in the very midst of his own heavy duties or exhilarating relaxations. But he made his best amends by giving her what he thought she wanted—namely, more money to spend on her dress, and a servant to do the work of the little Walworth house: also sundry counsels to be more friendly with her neighbours, and little homilies on not selfishly shutting oneself up alone. Consolations gloriously masculine.

Meanwhile, when he did see her she was much quieter than of old, and less petulant. She said nothing more about music-halls and pantomimes, diligently practised her music, was more clearly interested in her little household affairs, and took to a careful course of reading. He concluded that she was happy and forebore to ask questions. He was too busy.

One day, during the autumn, Veronica's motor came dashing and snorting up the small drab street, when a rainy wind blew bits of yellow paper and dreary refuse about its gutters, and a tiny, dingy milk cart went slowly clattering from door to door, hailed at intervals by aproned ladies at the doors holding out meagre glass jugs for a "ha'porth" of the thin blue liquid. Stillingfleet was in the car with Vera, and when the noisy thing stopped and snorted in its loud ungracious way, they both alighted and rattled loudly on Clo's little portal. She saw them from an upper room and ran down herself to open the door.

Vera, ruddy with her spin, looked large-eyed, dashing, vivacious, a vision of a livelier world to that of this drab, dull street, and she flew at Clo with a string of high-pitched, unanswerable questions, which, if useless, at least covered the girl's momentary shyness. She had an immense white fur coat over a frock of vivid red, and her white motoring hat was hidden under a gauzy red veil, which she tossed off from her beaming face. She demanded to be taken instantly to Clo's sitting-room—she *must* see her house, she said.

This apartment was up a narrow staircase—all the lower part of the house was used by Mark as a sort of business office, etc., and when Vera and Stillingfleet arrived in it they found it already occupied by Mrs Deane, who rose and stood meekly aside as they entered, and made to depart. The room was littered with sewing.

“Oh! no, don’t go,” said Vera, breezily, “we’ve only come to look.” She turned and studied Mrs Deane’s countenance with her usual alarming rudeness. “What a nice face you’ve got,” she said; “you are a sweet person. Who are you? Mr Hading’s sister?”

“Oh, no, madam,” she answered, a painful blush mounting slowly to her pale brow, adding, “I am the sister of the poor: a Mission woman, that is all.”

“Oh, that sounds nice and nunlike—the sister of the poor. Do stay. I like to look at you. How interesting. Fancy. Mrs—Mrs—Mrs—er—oh—Hading, what are all these clothes on the floor? I didn’t know you had so many children. How many have you?”

It was Clo’s turn to blush, though she did this more angrily than shyly, having already heard that tone in the voice of Mrs Trinder. Lady Vera was doomed to remind her of the worthy undertaker’s wife, she did not know why. She was not clear-headed enough to see that impudence in any class is pretty much alike.

“Those are for the poor children,” she answered, controlling the old sharpness in her



voice as best she could, "I have none of my own. Mrs Deane here and I have been making them, and were interrupted in the middle of sorting them out into lots when you came—Lady Veronica," she added rather unwillingly.

"Oh, I see. How charming. Do you work for the poor? How nice of you. How perfectly sweet. Mr Hading talks about them and you dress them. That's a beautiful idea. Isn't it?" she said, turning to Stillingfleet, who was pulling his moustache and looking rather sheepish by the door.

"I can't do much," said Clo, "but there are plenty of children about here who need things, and I have time on my hands. My husband is so good—he gives his whole time for them. So also does Mrs Deane. So I can't be quite idle."

"*Do* you?" said Vera, turning again to the gentle Dorcas. "But how quite beautiful to give your whole life for them, and how dirty and infectious and all that. What horrid swearing words they must say. How interesting. And what a pretty uniform; you look like the sweetest Quakeress, indeed you do. Really, I wish grey would come into fashion again, absolutely I do; I should love a get-up like that. Only I couldn't wear my hair so. And you look so sweet, so happy, somehow—what is it?"

"Madam," answered the other, shyly, "you say many kind things in the goodness of your young heart. But they are too good for one like myself. Please say no more."

"But you do," persisted Vera, "most awfully sweet. What is it? How do you do it?"

"My lady," she said softly, "I love God, and my neighbour. I know of nothing else."

Vera said "Oh!" with a jerk, as if she had been sharply hit, and went a little red under her make-up. After a little more of such talk she rose to go, and rustled noisily down the narrow staircase, shedding desperately the perfume, like prayer-books and bird seed and new railway carriages, in which her soul delighted. Suddenly she stopped and shrieked.

"Oh! where's the lodger?" she cried. "*Do* show me the lodger. I must see him. I've never, never seen one yet. I can't go away without that."

"But we haven't one now—I'm sorry," said Clo, politely.

Vera flounced into Mark's study, a little room full of pigeon-holes and rolls of paper, with a common lamp on a deal table.

"Well, show me where he was then," she said. "Was he in here? Dear, dear, what a funny little mousetrap. Did he really live in here? Really? Is he dead? He couldn't survive this, you know."

"No," said Clo, "she—it was a 'she'—is not dead. You have just seen her: my friend upstairs, Mrs Deane, was our lodger."

"That sweet person? Is *that* what they look like. But how very nice. After all, slumming and all that seems quite romantic," she added meditatively. "Your husband is a

*great* friend of mine." Then again, in the shriek, "When are you coming to see me, you wonderful serious little person? I want to hear about your doings. It is so interesting. I often see your husband; he is very clever and most gloriously handsome. Where *did* you pick him up? You might have left him for me. Come along, Basil," she added.

Stillingtonfleet, thus addressed, got into the motor with her, after giving his hand to Clo. There was more than a sheepishness about him to-day, though it was new to Clo, who often saw him when he came to see her husband. Hitherto regarding him with awe as the immaculate representative of the almost god-like Lord Henry Vade, to-day she seemed to feel a sense of contempt for him, she could not have told why. And he looked as though he deserved it. She stood at her little door and watched them.

When, a minute after, as they were adjusting the white rugs, she heard him answer Vera as "dearest," she thought she knew why. They spun away, looking happy and handsome, waving, laughing, glittering in the dull squalid street like beings from a fairy sphere. But for the watching girl some of the glamour had gone.

## CHAPTER XI

THE long late nights at the House, especially during the debating over his Bill, had made it a necessity that Mark should have a club somewhere in its precincts, and after some deliberation he had found a suitable one to which he was easily elected.

His keen absorption in his affairs kept him more and more at this place, or rather between this place and the House, and Clo's loneliness became an absolute burden.

At this time Lady Listower, hearing of Vera's visit, had herself driven over and fetched the girl to spend an hour or so with her, feeling that her son would thus be won to gratitude ; also a little conscious that he had taken Mark up so completely that wives under such circumstances could have no chance ; and last but not least being kindly disposed towards Clo herself.

She was very gentle with her, recognising her as something to be rather pitied. And she was interested at once in the poor girl's attempt at a little philanthropy of her own. She promised to help her with her collection of warm clothing for her poor children, and gave her kind hints of how to set about doing so herself.



She lent her books and encouraged her to read and to talk of what she had read; and told her little things about the great world, about customs, manners and ways, all of which her pupil drank in eagerly. They were more interesting things than poor Fortescue's bits of bygone information, and the listener took them all in with a surprising quickness. Her ladyship had been the first to really discover Clo's good looks, and she now encouraged the girl in her off-hand, rattling fashion to pay a more sensible attention to these herself. She criticised her simple dress and enlightened her into theories as to hair-dressing. The gentleness of the pupil, her real gratitude, her quaint and graceful reticence, were all in her favour, in addition to her fine and handsome presence; and Lady Listower grew interested on her own account in this very apt and affectionate pupil, who blushed so prettily at favours and who regarded the great world of fashion with such exquisite awe.

So after this it became a custom for Clo to visit Lady Listower and spend some time with her once a week, reading to her occasionally (she read clearly and well), or more often listening to her with wide sparkling green eyes.

Like all Cockneys the girl was a born imitator, keen of observation, sharp at self-defence, and wonderfully agile at adaptive intelligence, and she was wonderfully apt in picking up the ways and tones of this new world of which she now got such charming

glimpses. An innate sense of refinement, perhaps born of her long association with good if humble people, taught her strangely to reject the evils that flourished in that Park Lane paradise and only to imitate the graces. Consequently there was no echo of Vera's impertinences and cynicisms, or my lady's temper and scandal in the little tags she picked up—only the daughter's ease and daintiness, and the mother's chivalry and consideration of others seemed to strike her low-born mind as worth copying. This was possibly quite vulgar of her. But it was a blessing to herself and to her husband.

Lady Listower, considering the drive to Walworth "impossible," gave it as her opinion that Hading ought not to live there. She suggested a flat in Westminster as a more reasonable abode for a member. She spoke to Henry about it herself one night after the opera, and said she could do much more for the girl—she said "that poor dear thing"—if she did not live in quite the wilds of nowhere. She said this pathetically, with a gaudy pink topaz and diamond tiara glinting gaily a little too far back on her head, and occasionally levelling her glasses belligerently at other ladies crowned with similar things, varying from priceless jewels like her own to tinsel and beetles' wings. It was a "royal" night and she had been feeling very keenly the loss of her youth in the sense, real or fancied, that she was not so much noticed—she called it "seen"

—as of yore. She felt a little cold, and a little old, and rather tired. Believing that her charm had gone, she thought, woman-like, she would now be “good.” A woman once said, “It’s so tiresome to be good—there’s time enough for that when I begin to grow ugly.” Possibly more than one woman has said, or thought, that more than once. In any case, bad or good morality, it prompted now the charitable thought, the benevolent idea. And Henry caught at it, making ready and varied suggestions for the project and feeling confident that if it could be managed he could do far more for Hading in other plans he was forming for him.

So eager was he that when the opera was over and he was standing with his mother in the lobby, waiting for her brougham, he suddenly caught her bright dark eyes on his face, re-lighted up with affection, and said,—

“How jolly young you are looking to-night, mamma.”

And Lady Listower forgot she had not been “seen,” bridled her neck, lost the creases under her eyes, and smiled sighingly, so that even the hard electric light and the pink jewels did not unbecome her. There is, the French say, a beauty of the soul: this was the beauty of the heart. And strangely it irradiated.

Hading, when tackled about it the next day, liked the idea, but doubted its effect on his supporters at so early a date.

“They needn’t know,” said Lord Henry.

"You must keep on the house at Walworth and receive deputations there—in fact, use it for business. Mrs Hading should go there pretty often to be seen about the place. She doesn't go about much, you say, so who's to know whether she lives there altogether or not?"

"Very well," said Hading, "that might be managed. My wife does charitable work there on a small scale—to amuse herself," he added thoughtfully. "She would often need to be there. As you say, they hardly need know. It need not make much disturbance. I should be glad of quarters nearer here, especially now that I want a quiet hole to write in: the club is not private enough, and I waste endless time going to and fro to Walworth, and even when there the noises of the street make writing impossible."

Without much delay a flat was found in Westminster, to which very few of the household gods were brought, but which was cheaply but effectively furnished for their use. And Clo came to it, pleased in a sense with a new home—as what young wife would not be?—but vaguely ill at ease about leaving the few old friends and the familiar place where their good fortunes had begun.

Mark laughed at her and pinched her ear and called her "sentimental." At which she laughed too, but asked, even before her laugh died down, if she might not still go on with her work for the children and use the upper floor



as a meeting-place for them when Dorcas Deane held classes or gave little treats to them.

"Ah, of course," said Mark, "you can do as you like about that. But don't let them know—the people, I mean—that we no longer live there; say nothing at all about it. Let them think we are still in the place—it's better for a time at anyrate."

"Why?" said Clo, astonished.

"Don't you see, dear?" he answered. "I can live where I like, of course, but it would shake their confidence in me—my people there, I mean, my constituents—if they thought I had left them now that success is crowning my efforts at last. Of course I haven't—I'm working myself to death for them night and day, as you know. Look at all this stuff I'm writing for the *Daily Mercury* on their behalf: I haven't had a night's rest for ever so long—all for them. Last night the House didn't rise till two o'clock, and yet I'm cramming in all this literary work too. I don't know how to do it. It's killing work."

"Then why not tell them that, Mark," she persisted. "They would see how noble you are—they would understand. They'd admire you."

"No, they wouldn't," he answered a little shortly; "they're very stupid about some things."

"But it's the truth—" began Clo.

"Now, my dear, don't be silly," he said

again a little tartly ; “ there are matters you can’t, as a woman, be expected to understand. Just say nothing about your new home. There’s no need. They’ll find it out soon enough.”

He said the last words half to himself. Clo felt puzzled, and looked so, knitting her pretty marked brows and looking wistfully out of the window over the roofs and chimneys to where the trees of the Green Park showed blue and faint in the wet winter haze, and the distant bulk of Buckingham Palace loomed like a gigantic monster in a sea of French grey.

He saw her mood, and during the evening, when he ran in for a hurried dinner between two deadly debates, he gave her a cheque of a size startling to one so unused to cheques, and told her to go to-morrow and buy herself some pretty frocks. In the old days—the days of the “ten three” pearl necklace—she would have been ecstatic at such a gift. Now, though she thanked him smilingly enough, her voice was rather breathless and she looked doubtful and a little bewildered. Man-like he deemed the bewilderment to be called forth at the size of the cheque.

“ It’s all right,” he said, “ I can spare it. I don’t do all that hard work for nothing. We shall be rich one day, Flower. You trot out, like a good girl, and buy yourself some dresses. Get some evening things—what do you call them?—like Lady Veronica wears at night. You ought to dress for dinner

now. That thing you've got on is only fit for mornings."

"Oh! Mark," she said, "like Lady Vera? Like that dress she came in to the lecture? Not so grand as that, surely?"

"Well, no," he said; "besides, that isn't your style—you're too fair for orange. But something black and glittering like a scaly snake—she had one like that on last Tuesday. It would suit you. It was splendid."

"Did you see her last Tuesday?" asked Clo. "Where?"

He dropped his eyes and moved his head carelessly. "Oh! I dined there," he said; "didn't I mention it, dear?"

"No," she answered unsuspiciously. Of course he dined with these great people. He was so great himself. She must expect that.

"Lady Vera's a great friend of yours, Mark, isn't she?"

He glanced up sharply. "Yes, she is very kind," he answered rather oddly. "That is—she understands me. She is well up in all the ins and outs of political life. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Clo. "I think because she once told me she was. She meant to be kind and polite, I think."

Later on she asked, "May I tell Dorcas Deane?—about our removal, I mean. She must know already, I should think, but I didn't see her to actually say 'Good-bye.' I told her I should be away for a night or two."

"Oh! you can tell her," he said, "she won't

repeat it or make mischief. She's a good soul."

The touch of patronage in his tone jarred a little. Her large grave eyes looked at him steadily.

"I never met her equal," she said.

Next day she went over to Walworth and told Dorcas about their affairs. Dorcas said little, but her gentle face was graver for a while after, but she wished her friend every happiness in her new home and spoke gently of the greater responsibility of greater powers. Then they entered so deeply into their plans for their beloved children that they forgot, both of them, the unpleasant impression, vague, indefinite, that floated about Mark's request for silence as to his movements. They both loved him too well not to feel an inward chill at his action: yet also too well to discuss the matter even in their secret hearts.

Clo had an idea of carrying on a little club in the half-empty house on somewhat the lines of Mark's sensational Bill: Mark had inspired her originally, and now the idea seemed capable of development. It was to be for quite young children, and was to train them in religion, manners, morals, and the laws of health. Dorcas was delighted. Her sweet hazel eyes were beaming. Here was just the work she loved. She could give a large part of her evenings to such a scheme, and superintend it without neglecting her other work, while Clo would come to and fro from Westminster and



work it at her will. There were already dozens of little ones only too ready for such assistance. They were busy for an hour drawing up rules and lists of possible membership drawn from the mass of their ragged little friends.

Then Dorcas got up and put on her grey cloak. She must go to her district work—time was up.

Clo wended her way homewards full of plans and cheerful hopes, smiling to herself as she walked across Westminster Bridge and looked at the great stretching stone-city of St Stephen's, and reflecting that Mark was in there doing his great work. She looked wonderfully different, even now, from the girl of old days. The better air of her new home, combined with the excitement of fresh outlooks, new interests and the zest of the whole thing, had given her good looks a life and verve they had painfully lacked in the old sulky days of nothing to do and nothing to think of save self.

Her skin looked clearer and her daily walks part of the way to Walworth now began to give her a faint rose flush and brighten her green eyes. Her features, once puffy and rather stupid-looking, had developed a clearer, sharper formation by that most mysterious of processes—the working of higher thoughts. They now looked short, neat, clearly-cut little features, and the thick under-lip was no longer sulky but only wore that charm of hauteur so adorable in the Princesses of the Austrian

Royal family, the celebrated lip that Napoleon worshipped in his second wife, the Austrian blonde, and which all the world raved about in Elizabeth, the murdered Empress, rightly surnamed "Juno."

One of those fine days Lady Listower had sent her maid round to the Westminster flat and told Clo to let her be of use to her inchoosing some dresses. And the woman's good sense had taught her to advise the plainest of garments for the most part, though in good materials and faultless cut, and Clo's fine figure, now a little fuller than of yore, was tall and straight as that of a slender goddess in the graceful set of these garments. She became a distinctly pretty woman of a very uncommon type, and began to attract marked admiration.

Thus gradually these two slum people began to rise inch by inch. The air at great heights, as is well known, is light. You must keep a watch upon your head, lest it too get light and dancing. And as heights are mainly a matter of comparison you cannot begin your watching too early.

## CHAPTER XII

LADY VERA and Mark were certainly great friends, as he had admitted. It is not clear what a woman of her temperament saw in such a man as Mark Hading, except that the conquering of such an undoubted and arrogant power brought to her mean little mind some vague sense of gratified vanity. Mark had never looked at a woman of her sort besides herself, and was the last man to do so. He was rapidly growing famous, but in the particular respect of women was apparently invulnerable. His speeches, his writings, his handsome person, combined with such absolute remoteness, made the subduing of him by herself a great triumph to this lady. She had always imagined herself to possess brains. Not the common ordinary brains that make women successfully conduct households, bring up fine manly sons, paint pictures, write books, or do anything so rudely obvious and definite, but those wonderful elusive brains that make you mysteriously misunderstood by your more vulgar acquaintances and have the wonderful effect of exonerating you completely from all duty—parental, filial, wifely or social. Vera thought she could have ruled courts, have

shone in political intrigue, have swayed ministers, have been an eighteenth-century *précieuse*. She did not for one moment believe that her power was at fault because no particular court as yet acknowledged this subtle, airy sway ; she was only pettishly conscious that the background was unexplainably wanting. Backgrounds have a horrible way of being wanted at the right moment. No one but a *poseur* can tell the agony of finding those wretched scenes that ought to have supported one sliding, gliding, moving rapidly away, leaving only bare boards and no proper footlights. Those witty cardinals, those gallant kings, those intriguing courts that Vera felt that she could have had at her feet whilst she swam about in glorious brocades and said smart things—how tiresome that they did not seem to be forthcoming. So she said she was misunderstood, quoted the most fatalist bits from Omar Khayyam wrongly, criticised all her friends, came down late to breakfast, and was rude, very rude, to her mother.

Genius will often manifest itself in these little ways. The artistic or the *spirituelle* temperament is wonderfully subtle, especially the kind that never produces anything vulgar enough to get into print or to go to Eton. It marks priceless editions with impudent little comments out of its own poor store of stock epigrams and passes for "brilliant" with its friends. Much more brilliant than the Philistine clod who wrote the books for it to scintil-



late about, of course. So Vera, who had friends who were merely beautiful, or merely clever, set her wide-apart almond eyes in slightly-caricatured pose of pensiveness and said cutting and sarcastic things about them in a sweet, thin voice that proved her to be infinitely their superior. It was the finer spirit of a finer ether lightly touching on the coarser, commoner clay that satisfied a vulgar and stupid world. Some of those pretty women had a horrible way of satisfying that vulgar and stupid world—a rather persistent way in spite of Vera's strictures. It must not be understood from this that Vera herself was not pretty. In a hard, metallic way she certainly was, and most men who met her really believed in her hair, which showed that she was. But having early in her career discovered that blatant selfishness, rudeness and greed put a certain limit even to the power of beauty, she had explained to herself the fact that she did not entirely rule the world by finding that the world was too vulgar to appreciate her rule. From this her consciousness of genius grew. In place of the Chateaubriands, the Louis the Fifteenths, the Mazarins, the George the Fourths, the Napoleons that she felt she could have swayed by a jerky wave of her scraggy little finger in a more effective age, she found a materialistic, obstinate, married Labour member with rather bad manners for her cause of triumph. But he took more than a little finger to fascinate. You had to work very hard.

You had to be frightfully sympathetic and very touchingly womanly, and that was really hard work sometimes. Still, he was worth it. Wherever he went he became violently the central figure, and that glory you naturally shared. And he might become rich, and more powerful still. Vera adored every sort of luxury. She must and would have it. She had a very good allowance from her father—to some it would have seemed like a fortune in itself—but it was never half enough for her myriad wants. The presents of a man like Mark would be infinitely useful. Vera invariably regarded such “friends” from the point of view of presents.

Besides, time had gone on somewhat fast and people had a way of overtaking one, such as *débutantes* and new people. Vera always called these “raw,” implying that she herself was supremely cooked—as, in a sense that chartered accountants use the word, she was. Of course, during the years she had been out she had had “offers,” but so many of them were insignificant. One had developed into an actual engagement—he was a fine young officer, the heir to a baronetcy—but Vera had begun her delicate, brilliant counter intriguing with other men a little too soon in the history of this romance, even before the wedding dress was ordered, and the young soldier, after finding her out in an elaborate scheme concerning the clandestine meeting of two other men respectively, one of terrible character, a scheme

involving the telling of three separate lies to himself, promptly quarrelled with her and the match was broken off. Her ambition to become a smart, flirting married woman, a queen of fascination, overcame her discretion as to the proper time to begin these operations. She lost the budding baronet, who was rich and honourable. Later on he married a pretty girl of her own set, whom Vera designated as "middle class" because she never disgraced him. From this time onward her own career had been a series of flirtations leading to nowhere but a greed for more.

She is not interesting, except as a type of the kind of siren men will take quite seriously. You can never judge a man's intellectual capacity by the kind of woman he takes seriously. Noble beings of the greatest acumen and cleverness in other walks will look upon such bolstered, shallow, paltry charms as Vera's with reverential awe. A man who will never make a single mistake in the reading up of a business opponent, a man friend, a servant, or an ugly woman, will most amazingly take these rickety graces on trust, the whole gamut of them. Very often the cleverer and better the man the more easily does the gilded plaster Venus impose upon his credulity.

Mark had found the new world to which he was admitted a great contrast to what he had supposed in the Minden Street days. He had had no experience of women of the upper classes. Vera, at the Islington meeting, had

been the first to light upon his path at anything like close quarters. Up to his introduction to her and Lady Listower he had always regarded the feminine element as insignificant, as men of low origin invariably do so regard it. Something to get the dinner, to soothe the sick, to bear the tempers, and, if you grew rich, to heap expensive clothes upon (sealskin jackets and diamond earrings by preference and, say, a "silk gown") that the world might behold the evidences of your wealth. As a good man, a religious man, he had, of course, been kind to his particular woman in a vague, large way, but it had never dawned on him that she had even the makings of an intellect, owing, of course, to her sex, and naturally as a being so clearly inferior he had never regarded her influence as worth considering. It is one of the oddest of facts that the higher you go in civilisation the less is this attitude taken by men. A parvenu will reveal it again and again, and with it his own origin. A gentleman never.

Mark's first notion that a different order of women existed from those his friends had been used to occasionally patronise as "you ladies" in public, and quarrel with behind the scenes, was got from Vera. To him, therefore, her brains, her wit, her sympathy, her influence came as a revelation of an entirely new type. He naturally took it quite seriously. He had no means of comparing it with the real thing and so judging of its falsity. For a woman to quote books so lightly, so gaily (and, had he



but known it, so incorrectly), to speak with such intelligence, yet such deference to his own opinion, was a new and fascinating experience. "Fine ladies," as he had been wont to call them, should, by the rights of things, be empty-headed, selfish, frivolous. But this one knew more, in some matters, than he did. Had he but known it, much more. Lady Listower, too, haughty but tactful, interesting, clever, could converse in a way he had never imagined any woman conversing. They were an absolute opening up of a new world to him. Beside them Clo, infinitely improved as she had seemed to him under Fortescue's instruction and Dorcas's loving influence, appeared silent, cold, stiff, uninteresting.

He had not always approved of his too worldly wife, but he had never thought her common before. Yet now she began to seem just a little inferior. Much as she had changed and gained in dignity she was not quite what these great ladies were, and he doubted whether she ever could be. Vera, struck at once by his face, which was, as are the faces of all hard, earnest workers, strangely interesting, had reckoned him as by no means beneath the range of her bow and spear, even in those early days of his comparative obscurity. She had enjoyed flitting before him as a vision of an unattainable beauty and brilliance, as she put it to herself. These poor, dear "men of the people" were so tremendously in earnest. It was all so exciting, like playing with edged

tools. Stillingfleet, the secretary, with whom a tender understanding had fizzled along weakly for more than a year, was "no sport," as Vera inelegantly put it, to this dark-browed, fiery-tongued, decisive person with his definite beliefs and unbeliefs and possible fieriness and storminess of character.

Like all women Vera misread the stern concentration of an absolutely typical business face for hidden possibilities of passion. Women see that look of set purpose and concentration on a man's face and say to themselves, "How that man would love!" Yet the very concentration that wraps such men in the realities of the large lives they have set themselves is the surest preventative of anything like long and deep dallying in love. You cannot have Romeo and Isambard Brunel rolled into one. You can have the one or the other: Dante or a Cotton King; Byron or the Duke of Wellington. Great lovers are not made of great capitalists, organisers or soldiers. Men who do anything large in this way regard their women with flippant amiability, but never life-long, red-hot devotion. Of course women who are really worth the name are willing to accept this and even to prefer it to poetic dallyings, providing the man is great enough, and they will trot willingly after him and receive the occasional patronage and be happy ever after. But the average woman prefers Romeo because he necessitates her own sitting on a balcony, an endearing trait in the quality of his love.

Vera mistook Mark's dark cavernous eyes for Romeo's love-haunted depths. Really they were set sternly on the mere desire to work, and rise through work. Turned on you suddenly in a drawing-room they appeared to search your soul. If you were egotistical you at once concluded it was your soul alone in all the world that they searched: you forgot that they also searched ledgers, and flattering newspaper cuttings, and chances of advancement in exactly the same manner.

So Vera set to work to win for the advancement of her own vanity the supposed glowing heart of this most interesting man. And Mark, though incapable of elaborate devotion, was slowly but surely developing a large capacity for personal vanity—the most insidious kind of personal vanity, the kind that prides itself on its “power” and “force” and “magnetic personality.” A much worse kind than the mild species that breaks out in spotted socks and oddly-developed waistcoats and centre partings. And Vera's schemes caught that vanity through aiming at maudlin emotion only. And very surely she succeeded in her wretched endeavour. She must not be misunderstood. She was not cruel to Chloris. She had practically forgotten her. To Vera there was really no one in the world but Vera: absolutely she could not see anybody else, except dimly as through a fog, and then only on occasions. She was not erring consciously against the great moral laws. To her there

were no moral laws. There were customs in the big playground made for Vera to amuse herself, called the world, but they only remained even customs so long as they suited Vera. It was a simple code, and quite savage. Long-continued selfishness will make it beautifully attainable by everyone.

The only disadvantage is that in course of time, years and years of it, it really begins to make you look savage; it gives you a sharp face like a rat, and cunning rodent's eyes, and a nasty-looking jaw, which are not becoming decked out with the insignia and appurtenances of beauty. Did Darwin get his earliest inspiration for his famous theory from some hungry, self-ridden, haggard old faded charmer? If you do not come from apes you can get very near returning to them.

She had begun by sending him a note, a little, scrawly, whirly note, asking him something innocent about the meaning of one of his public utterances. He was flattered and replied at once. The coronet on the neat paper, combined with the innocence of stumbling woman asking for guidance from superior man, were piquant. He replied with grave kindness. A little later Vade asked him home to dinner, Lady Listower most amiably permitting—this being the only means of getting her son to come and see her on that particular night. There and then Vera was very enchanting. A man of her own world might have recognised several of the tricks she used



as a little worn, but to Mark they were all spontaneous graces. She begged to be informed about the "suffering millions."

"Poor things, isn't it sa—ad?" she said, opening her mouth like a fish, and enlarging her eyes to the "pensive point," while her head went wonderfully on one side. She was sitting in a high-backed Jacobean chair of black oak in the study after dinner as she made this tender observation. She wore a quaint dress of trailing white velvet, and orange topazes. Immediately she had uttered the remark, which required quite five seconds of pathetic staring into space to complete it, she forgot it suddenly and began violently arranging and spreading the folds of her dress over her silver slippers, with an eye to its effect against the black oak. Hundreds of women insist on "preening" in front of spectators with an ostrich-like blindness to the fact that other people see and recognise that gallant art. But no one is so blind to that fact as the quite self-satisfied enchantress who composes her dress, touches her hair here and there, arranges her jewellery during a conversation on quite other matters, with a sublime unconsciousness that anyone can see and follow the pantomime.

But Mark was not critical. He proceeded to talk about the "suffering millions" in a very fiery fashion. He also rather wished he was not wearing a morning suit, because he felt so insanely different to the other men. Even Pegram and Bunny, whom he regarded with

supreme contempt, looked tidier, somehow, than he did. It must be that idiotic dress. He had called them "fools" and "fops" in his mind when he first saw them, and he was not far wrong. But to-night, in the wide, beautiful study, they had the advantage of him. It had not been so bad at the carefully-shaded dinner-table, but here, on the polished floor of the stately apartment, he became aware of his boots to an extent that was quite crushing.

He reflected that prophets—great prophets—were always crucified more or less. He also remembered a moment later this was not for their boots. So he gladly plunged into conversation with Vera, who did not seem to be aware of his slight self-consciousness, and warming up to his subject became his own eloquent self, the platform self, in a very short time. She asked him to lend her a book on those dear, dear creatures—would he? Of course he would. Should he send it? Yes—or—oh, if he would call in with it some time when he had a moment's freedom. She had never heard anything so interesting. How wonderful he was. How heroic! "Ah, dear Mr Hading, we are none of us serious enough; but you—you could make us *think*."

Mark smiled consciously. He hoped to—he would try.

"When I think of all those poor creatures, Mr Hading, I feel so *unworthy*." Again that gasp and stare.

"Oh, no," said Mark, his eyes appraising the

fine old jewels on her slender neck, and thinking to himself that after all Dorcas Deane was not the only saintly woman of his acquaintance. Here was one quite as good without poor Dorcas's ugly bonnet.

"May I not do something to help them? What could I do? Isn't there some little work even for a frivolous worldling like little me?" she pleaded.

A man is deeply infatuated who can stand "little me" without wincing: it makes most decent Englishmen shudder and coil up into the shell for a time at least. But Mark stood it. What a sweet girl! How touching that anyone so rich and so beautiful should want to help the poor. He had always thought the women of the upper classes were "proud ladies," always acting that part, haughty and unapproachable, generally occupied in flaunting in chariots, and over-dressing. Yet here was one humbler than Dorcas herself; *she* had never called herself a little worldling and him a hero. In fact, of late, she had developed a distinct tendency to call him the worldling. But this woman was so clever and understanding, and yet so simple and childlike.

"There is nothing fit for you to do," he said softly. "It is all too rough. It is man's work. A rough man's. But such women as you can cheer us on, and soothe us after our toil. That is your work."

"Ah, yes, brush away the cobwebs," said Vera, sweetly, lapsing into one of her unfortunate similes, cobwebs being patently the

result of complete inaction. But they were both much too absorbed to notice such a trifle. That is the best of really exalted conversations. You soar above similes, bad or good. It is a blessing that it is so as they are generally shockingly bad.

So these two struck up a kind of platonic friendship of a semi-pathetic nature, Mark desperately flattered and the lady determined to be admired.

That night, when he went home to his Westminster flat in his jingling hansom, the dainty vision of Vera in white velvet breathing tender things about the dear poor danced continually before his eyes. It was a moonlight night, and as he came out into the big square from Whitehall the great towers of St Stephen's stood up sharply blue against the nameless silver azure of the night sky and filled his soul with a sudden sense of power and greatness to come. The Abbey looked black in the mass of its own deep shadows. The statue of Beaconsfield cast a sharp black line behind it on the cropped grass, which showed up green and quivering and etherealised in the flood of moonlight. It was a very fine world, a grand world—a world that, after all, acknowledged you if you stuck to things long enough. He did not define quite what things he was sticking to. But he had a growing income, and had dined well with a peer, and there was a beautiful woman who truly appreciated him, and he was growing more famous, both as a writer and speaker, every day.



## PART II

### CHAPTER XIII

TWO YEARS had passed away since the Hadings' flitting over the river, years politically eventful.

The Prime Minister was giving a reception, quite a private affair, or rather as private as anything prime ministerial could hope to be. As a matter of fact it did not call itself political, neither was it: those gorgeous days of the old *salon*, revived again by Mr D'Israeli's writings, only to die out again in an age of restaurants and rushing, were over for ever. Prime ministers doff their skins nowadays at parties and become ordinary persons, leopards without spots, quite ordinary beings without a penchant for special breakfast dishes or anything unusual, say, at a house-party, and quite without the least wish to contradict everybody at a dinner. The times change. This particular one, of the time of which I write, was a burly person of no particular ability, with the general appearance of a rather unhappy 'bus-driver: only he was not horsey. He was really nothing very striking, save that he had no sense of humour, if that is striking, and was generally in a condition of being eternally aggrieved.

His house was palatial, his wife a fine woman

of some presence, delightfully indifferent to the claims of ambition, being chiefly wrapped up in the rearing of a large and healthy and plain family, and comfortably without imagination, fear or vanity. This good lady, dressed like a stage duchess in a glittering robe of pink and gold trailing four yards behind her, had a theory that it was absolutely immoral to do ought with your hair save tug it back by the roots and twist it in a vicious knot behind. Her own locks being shiny black and glossy as a raven's wing, this style did not so greatly unbecome her as might have been the case had she been fair ; and her head being a fine shape, and her marked healthy features serenely good-humoured, she gave a pleasant and rather comely impression : only her coiffure added ten years on to her age.

Somehow, in the midst of her marble halls, whose towering white pillars rose round her on every side, backed by banks of hydrangeas and palm, and robed in that clinging dream of a southern sunset that fitted her like a glove, she still managed to give the impression that she had just come from superintending the bathing of the children, and the steam and the soap and the jollity still shone in her genial blue eyes. Character will out. She hadn't been bathing her children. The youngest was at Eton, and they were all long past such childish ways, but still her firm handshake suggested a visit to the dentist, and her breezy voice a call at the chiropodist and the hairdresser ; and when

she bustled her guests about in her vigorous way one thought of copy-books and milk puddings.

Her guests swarmed up the staircase, however, at a great rate, oblivious of these wandering influences, and crowding into the marble *salon*, a mass of glitter and chatter and colour. The Prime Minister himself welcomed them all, with something of the air of the Mock Turtle in *Alice in Wonderland*, it is true, but more composed than might appear. He was not really sad.

Most of the Listowers were there: Henry flitting about like a dragon fly; Veronica very brilliant in an impossibly simple gown of white iridescent gauze and floating blue scarves, arranged as Emma Hamilton *à la* Diana, which part she really looked until you actually met the hardness of her eyes, when the resemblance became a caricature.

Lady Listower in heliotrope, with a trellis-work of silver chenille all over her, appeared to be in a cage, which her expression of chronic indignation seemed to justify, as of some wild animal in captivity. Pegram, her son, was flirting with an American heiress who was snubbing him incessantly without making the faintest impression; and Bunny was muttering general complaints of things generally into the ear of a very Titian-headed but rather handsome lady with immense sapphires round her plump neck, whom the world called Lady Ulma Prinz, the wife of a great speculator of that name. She was replying with unction to his grumbles.

"Yes, isn't it?" she was saying in a slow, fat voice, "sickening. I'm sure I'm miserable, and Agnes is miserable, and Dobbin's miserable. The whole thing's beastly."

"Well, I always told you that's what would happen," said Bunny, "didn't I?"

"Well, and I said so too," she answered; "you know I did. I said it at Goodwood, and I say it now, and I shall always say it. I'm tired of saying it."

"It's a most off world," replied he. "That's just my opinion. Everything goes to pot. Where's the good?"

His companion shrugged.

"Heaven knows. I call it most tiresome. First there's one, then there's another bothering at you. Things bore me so that I have taken to Turkish baths. One must do something. And there isn't anything to do either. Do you know anything to do?"

"No, only bridge. And it generally does you," he replied dejectedly.

"Well, I shall take to a blue veil," she replied, "and have an operation. But even that's overdone. I'm sick of everything."

They stood staring vacantly at space, side by side, the big woman and the little man with perhaps the blankest expression human countenances can ever be supposed to attain. And no one pitied them. Life is full of misunderstandings.

Sir Samuel Crawshay was talking to a Duke whose blue order little became his sallow com-



plexion. Crawshay himself was the picture of health and good spirits, having in a year's sport in the Highlands, on the Continent, and round the place generally, recovered a little from his cousins.

"What happened to Arthur?" the Duke was saying. Crawshay laughed shortly.

"Spirit rapping," he answered with contempt, "and tabloids. Beeton had an operation on his little finger—or his shirt-stud, I'm not sure which. It got into the papers, though. Claude now eats stuff you can only get from South America in tins, and writes woolly pamphlets on anthropomorphic man. I pray this Government keeps in long enough to allow them to die of their various complaints before they get another chance of office."

"I think you are doomed to disappointment," answered the sallow Duke; "these people are breaking up fast—breaking up fast. Even their own household turns against them—look at that *Daily Mercury* man. See how he has veered round since Vade put him on that hobby-horse. What is his name? Hade—Hading. Did you see his leader this morning? I don't know what we are coming to. What is a Radical? What is a Labour leader? There are no landmarks left."

"I can't make that fellow out," said Crawshay, thoughtfully; "I don't know what he does want. He doesn't either, I'll be bound. But he's jolly clever. Have you seen his wife? She's lovely."

At this moment the pair they spoke of entered the room, There was quite a hush at their entrance, but they walked in quietly enough, Hading even with a knitted brow and an air of abstraction.

Chloris was in a pure silver gown like a sheath. It clung closely to the figure and fell away at the train in a great sweep along the floor: it was not the glitter of sequins but solid cloth of silver. She had a girdle of fine pearls and green embroidery with stole ends falling down the front. Her honey-coloured hair was dressed simply in a long coil roped right down the back of her neck, and a tiny pearl and silver tiara showed right in the front. Her resemblance to the late Empress of Austria, first openly discovered by Lady Listower, was now remarkable; save that she was fair and Elizabeth dark, her features, brows and carriage of the head were identical.

Her beauty was patent to all. Crawshay went forward at once, and soon quite a crowd surrounded her. She was superb to look at, though, as of old, she had little or nothing to say. Her husband finding his own level as quickly as she, they were soon separated. The sallow Duke urged forward for an introduction, but it was Lord Listower who took her away for refreshment, feeling in some dim way a right to her society on the strength of his having been Ambassador in the old days in the country of her prototype.

He enjoyed the sensation she created: but

more than all, being an old gentleman, he enjoyed her calm indifference to it. She charmed him as a character study. No one was ever quite clear whether she was very stupid or very good. As a matter-of-fact it had taken all her energies to learn what she had learnt since her slattern days, and she had none to spare for small talk.

"You must muzzle that husband of yours," he said when he had found her a seat; "he does talk too much, you know."

She looked hurt.

"He knows best what to say, dear Lord Listower," she answered, "he is so clever. Why are they all so cross about that leader in his paper? Surely a man has a right to his convictions?"

"Surely," he answered purringly. "What are his convictions? Has he any?"

"Oh! you are unkind," she said; "please say no more."

"Ask Henry what he thinks, then. You and I won't quarrel—we are such good friends—Henry shall do the quarrelling."

"I don't understand business," she said slowly, "but I see my husband must be entirely independent once and for all. I believe he is to buy the *Mercury* from Lord Henry? When he is the proprietor himself he may write his own leaders, may he not?" she smiled rather sadly.

"You must write them for him," he answered indulgently; "*you* are still the Walworth Radical—yet, in addition, a crowned Queen."

She took it jokingly, as it was perhaps meant, but the phrase worried her afterwards and hung about in her mind like a cobweb. "You are still the Walworth Radical." What did he mean. Of course Mark was not quite the same as in the old days—how could he be? There was his tremendous work, there was the deep complication of political life: there was first of all his writing, grown so famous, and now his editorship of the big newspaper, the *Daily Mercury*, of which Vade had become proprietor. All these things were absorbing. If Mark talked less about the poor they knew, and even saw them less, she made up for it, and he knew that and relied upon her, so she argued. She was proud of the reliance. It was her work. Lord Listower did not understand him—could not, being only a very courtly, smiling old gentleman. He was very kind and nice, but great souls were beyond him. He could not comprehend a mind like Mark's. She knew Mark as he really was.

Later on Crawshay claimed her and they strolled along a grove of hydrangeas and lilies to get the air, finding the big *salon* too close. His admiration for her was as unbounded as his family feuds, but it was tempered with a respect absolute in its sincerity.

"How are the slum babies?" he asked.

"Dear things," she answered, an honest flush on her brow giving reality to her words, "they are doing splendidly. I have had to take the next house—the old one was too small."



"If *you'd* gone down to the House last year," he said, his eyes sparkling with admiration, "that Bill would have gone through. You seem to be able to carry out in practice all that your husband talks about."

She glanced at him sharply. She was growing painfully alert for sarcasm on that subject in those days, and acquiring almost a defensive manner. But Crawshay was never sarcastic—he fought, when he did fight, with cudgels.

"That would be impossible," she answered, "the scheme was so vast and so wonderful and so good. I stick to my little corner of work—it's what I have been always used to, you see. Those people are my old friends."

"You angel," said Crawshay to himself: and "I see," to her.

Clo was not an angel. But she had had one great advantage in her peculiar career, she had never mixed with the middle classes. She had come straight from the lower to the higher, as a bubble shoots up to the sun, and she had not passed through the tainting fogs of middle-class snobbery at all. Consequently she did not understand that she ought to look down on the Walworth folk, and it never occurred to her to pretend that she had been a sort of small "somebody" in the old days. She was as frank as a beggar or a queen.

"But everybody," continued Crawshay, "doesn't want to go back to old friends. One grows out of them, don't you think?"

"Oh! possibly, yes, if they're quite well off

and happy and all that," answered she, "but you see mine weren't. They were hungry and very miserable, and they had no fires, and the children had no boots. I did not myself see how miserable they were till my husband's career took me away from them. Then I began to find it out. But he saw it all along—he had the eye of a seer."

Crawshay, remembering the *Daily Mercury* leader turning its cruel irony on to that very class, forbore to whistle, as he would have much liked to do. He turned the talk to lighter things, and hearing music in an inner room they made their way in that direction. Just by the door of the music-room, in the shadow, two figures were standing with their backs to Crawshay and Clo—a man and a woman. As the others approached she heard the man say,—

"I shall always believe you are the one woman, Vera. We learn these things too late." The voice was Mark's. It was low and earnest. There was a murmured response from Emma Hamilton *à la* Diana. He went on speaking. Clo drew back with a sudden chill at her heart and turned to retrace her steps. At the rustle of her silk dress on the polished floor Veronica slightly turned her head and her hard eyes looked mockingly out of the dusk, but she said nothing. She had seen Clo's face. Crawshay followed without a word, aware of the clash. Clo's face was deadly white and she was walking straight ahead not seeing where she was going. He felt in a miserable plight. Suddenly

an idea occurred to him. There was Lady Listower over by a fountain, talking to some friends: he made for her, Clo at his side.

"Mrs Hading's not feeling well," he said on the spur of the moment.

"Oh! my dear child," said Lady Listower, "you look quite faint. Let me drive you home—do. I'm sick of this dull affair. The brougham can come back for Vera."

"I'll tell Mr Hading," said Crawshay, very red in the face and turning to fetch Mark.

"No, I thank you," said Clo, proudly, "I do not want—I would rather go with Lady Listower and make no fuss. If you will tell him, please, that I have gone," she said falteringly, rather as if in a dream.

He saw them to the door and wrapped Clo in her white furred cloak. She held out a very limp cold hand for "good-night." Lady Listower hustled him off more sharply.

"There, tell Timmins to drive on," she croaked, "there's a dear man. This poor child's tired out with all these late nights and all her hard work. This is what comes of being married to a social reformer."

"I'd like to give him a horse-whipping," said Crawshay to himself, "it would do him real, permanent good. Jove! I'm glad I haven't any talents. There's hardly a man in England who can stand 'em."

Over his shoulder he called out, "I'll go and tell Lady Vera you've gone." He was not entirely without talent, of sorts.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE *Daily Mercury* leader about which everyone was talking had taken even Mark's own friends by surprise. When Vade had bought the "rag" and put Mark in as editor nine months ago the thing was a mere name, a printed sign of what had once been a powerful party organ. It had been muddled this way and that by succeeding proprietors, editors and staffs till, after thirty years of not ignoble wanderings, it had come down to such shifts as giving away directories, selling coupons, and offering petty prizes. At this stage in its career, floating derelict upon a vague journalistic sea, bound for nowhere (and bound by no one), with only its once-powerful name on its torn flag to keep it from utterly foundering—a state of things only possible in a country so mercifully conservative to old things as ours—it had suddenly been towed into port by the all-powerful hand of Vade. Here it had been entirely overhauled and freshly rigged by its new owners, and set sail again with Mark Hading at its helm and a brand new staff of competent journalists under his command.

Hading's twenty-two years in a printing-office, working up from printer's "devil" at fourteen to master printer at thirty, and onwards for a year or two, had stood him in



good stead at this juncture. He had cut down expenses by putting on new and improved machinery requiring fewer hands: he had formed adamant office rules that would confine his working editorial staff to a minimum in point of numbers, producing a maximum of good, efficient labour. He had made things "hum" from the very first. His own daring, declamatory, yet sufficiently literary style had given new life to the thing, and by that mysterious force which makes personality tell even through the medium of a political report, he had put new life, new character into the thing.

His Child Citizen Bill, being too Quixotic, did not pass, but it made his name. And from its date he became a popular figure in the social world—a kind of champion of children. His strong set face and far-seeing eyes helped this impression with women. He was quoted as a wonderful sort of new St George, and certainly looked the part. And, ominous sign, he began to enjoy it.

Other big questions of his party had come along, and he had distinguished himself over and over again as a passionate pleader and marvellous speaker. So that, as a newspaper editor, he started clear with an audience, and he made the most of it.

From prosperity of a mild sort he had worked up to what a large part of the world would call wealth. Not only were his independent writings a large source of income, but the paper had gone forward by leaps and

bounds, the circulation in three months of its new life marking a record even in this age of big papers. The Westminster flat was soon found to be as absurdly small as the Walworth house, and Mark had taken a house in Queen's Gate; and Chloris had carriages, servants, and clothes such as which she could never have dreamed of. She also had crowds of friends, for Mark's social popularity was immense, and he was forever in request. His wit, his good spirits, his enthusiasm, his fine presence were welcome things even about the houses of people who thought a Labour member a sort of road scavenger; and his wife's beauty, good taste, and most fortunate tendency to silence, completed his conquest for him.

But a year had gone by in such wise, and though he was stouter in figure and louder in voice he had not gained in gay spirits. A little of his cheery lightness was gone, and his wit was sharper, and, though highly humorous when directed at your enemies, not so quaint when you yourself became its object. A certain dogmatism had been growing in his public utterances of late; but the world bowed—this is the prerogative of genius. Women raced after him for dinner-parties and house-parties; a growling great man may be quite as entertaining as an urbane one, from certain points of view. Not that Mark growled—he cut. His tongue took on, sometimes, the character of a whip lash. After all he was a reformer; they are always rude—at least the professional

ones are. So that the world, the gay world, laughed and giggled and enjoyed it; and repeated his bitter *mots* to its cronies and called him a darling.

Then had come along a great Labour crisis, where such a power as his was truly needed. Slack trade, the bitter years after a costly war, the bitterness of foreign competition, the in-flooding of aliens, the fearful conditions of house property and the rent problem, all the old, old cries had made themselves heard again with a force hardly equalled since the riots of 1884. Children were starving and suffering in millions, as in such cases they are bound to suffer much more than their elders; and to the Child Champion so many looked for partisanship.

A great epoch-making relief measure was at this moment before the House, and great things were hoped of it even by those whose party ideas differed entirely from those of its supporters. Then the *Daily Mercury* came out with its patronising and insidious but cruel, angry, mean sneer at the class most requiring its help. His friends thought Hading mad. He had not an easy time of it just then. But he stood to his guns, and with such drastic tongue-play that some of them retired amazed and rather skinned.

Vade, not easily shaken at any time, ventured on a remonstrance. He was met by a cool offer for his paper. It was the first intimation that they two should no longer work together. Vade put his long, pale finger-tips together in

a fan shape, and was silent for a space. He looked most stupid; but he was in reality deeply hurt. That was in the *Daily Mercury* office the morning following the Prime Minister's reception. Mark's eyes met his steadily; he repeated his offer.

"Very well," said Vade, "I will think it over and telephone my decision. You are a bigger kite, Hading, than I can hold in a high wind. Your future is your own. Remember also, however, that it is much to me, from the friendship point of view."

Mark put out his hand in his old frank way and wrung Vade's, but his face was a study.

"If you knew my life," he said slowly, "and my awful struggles you would not blame me. You, and men like you, have had power all your lives—you were born to it. I have had to sweat and weep tears of blood for it. Now I've got it I must use it. I've got a club in my hand, after being bound all my life: I must use it."

"Well," said Vade, shaking a sort of lightness into his voice, "come and dine with me to-night and we'll set matters in what order we can. There comes a time when you big chaps must forge ahead alone without let or hindrance. Rise or sink on your own, eh?"

"I shall not sink," said the great man, arrogantly, "don't you fear. I'm bound to rise."

"A-h," said Vade, "after all, it's a matter of definition — failure or success. I wish you luck, dear man, I wish you luck."

And he minced out, his pale grey, skin-tight



morning suit fitting on his thin figure in faultless long lines, his white eyelashes hiding his blue eyes, that smiled now as much as ever though his heart was sad, carrying a stick that had a murdered Pope's ring set in its quaint ivory handle, and a watch-guard that bore in a green turquoise casket the hair of a love-sick Stuart Queen—the image of decadent foppery, and as good a friend as Jonathan.

Behind the swinging of the baize doors his disciple and mental superior—his very human David—sat staring unseeingly at the piles of papers on his desk.

To his hand, with a little more effort, now lay wealth and homage. He already had the latter; the former was nearly his. When he had both really and finally in his grasp he would use them well—only let him get them—hold them. Then they could be turned to the good of the world; to the good of his old companions, his poor “labouring brethren.” He still used the phrase, even to himself, only it was cant now where it used to be sincerity. He shook himself angrily because he was half aware of this. After all, the working man was a great ass in many ways. See, now, what he might do if he tried. “Look,” said Mark to himself, “at me now. What help had I? I had to make my way.” Yet these poor chaps with the squalid houses and the dirty hands and the beastly manners—really beastly, he thought, recollecting a recent most rowdy and disgraceful meeting down in Walworth, where

he had met his constituents after a rather long abstention from that pleasure—they would talk as though it was the world's fault that they suffered. And did they suffer? Not much, he began to think. A lot of twaddle was talked about that and other things. Anyhow, they could smoke and drink enough to drown it—and did too: and their gambling was sickening. He had always raved against that from the first. He did still, for that matter. Even now, with all his temptations to do otherwise, he never played bridge, or smoked. He recollected this fact with a sensation of real gratitude to himself. True, he was no longer quite a teetotaller, because you must take your wine at a man's table: and there had been other little things that he had been obliged to alter—for instance, wearing evening dress, which he had sneered at in the old days as the mark of brainless fops and tyrants, below great minds such as his. That was before he had made his appearance at the Lord Mayor's banquet in a rather dirty morning coat and grey trousers and a red tie. Somehow, what he went through that night had burnt itself into his soul, and he had given way to convention in that matter ever after.

But these chaps, the working men, were they grateful? Not they. What was a life spent for them? They didn't care. He might kill himself for them. Would they thank him? Not they. As it was, they made his life a burden with their maniac deputations, their fool's interference, their crazy insults. Wasn't

he doing it all for them, and making a name too, which would enable him to do yet more? Of course he was.

Then the religious question—could a fellow drag that into the Houses of Parliament? Absolutely it wouldn't be decent. Just picture, now, a speech about the leader of Christianity in the very teeth of a grinning Opposition. Was it necessary? No. He broke a pen-holder angrily as he confessed this decision. Then his heart was soothed with another happy thought, equivalent to the gambling inspiration. Wasn't he going to teach them, religion, if you like, lots of other good ways, when he got "things" into his own hands? There was the crux—it was "things" that wanted controlling. When he reached that consummation he would teach them right enough—be the moral leader, the champion of truth, and all that. He could. He had the talent.

His wife worked so even now for children; it amused her and was consistent with his position. He liked her to do it. But, of course, later on he would take up the matter himself on a much larger scale and set it in full swing. Just now he was up to his eyes. There were questions to settle, enemies to square, daily engagements innumerable. Enemies, good Lord! He had enough, if any man had. A prophet hath no honour in his own country, he said to himself grimly. He was a prophet, understood by none—yes, well one. Vera understood him. His eyes narrowed a little,

just a little, at the thought, and he smiled. Those were the women to help men on—those sympathetic, brainy, clever women, who yet looked so bewitching, like Vera. Women who understood you at half a thought, half-expressed. Women with those understanding eyelashes. What was it? Clo, dear good girl, hadn't understanding eyelashes. Sometimes he thought she did not really understand him in many ways. She was always saying "why?" to such subtle sort of problems—things no fellow living could explain, but obvious things for all that. Thank Heaven she was a good girl and had turned out much better than anyone would have dreamed who had known the Walworth slattern of the old days. Religion suited her. She was handsome, too, in her way. She did him credit. But she had not, of course, the inborn charm, the sympathy, the tact—yes, that was the word, tact—of a high-born lady, a genuine aristocrat like Vera. Vera was all tact. The more he thought the word the more he liked it. It was really such a respectable way of describing long eyelashes.

And then how gracefully it covered qualms as to long hand-clasps, and long looks. Yes, it was an elastic, a graceful word. Cheered up he came back to business and the world.

In a week he became sole possessor of the *Daily Mercury*, and from that hour his wealth steadily increased. Before another two months were out he had bought another paper, a smaller thing it is true and on his own terms—not



Quixotic terms—and started running that with as much success in its way as the first. His duties were superhuman, yet his thick-set, powerful frame seemed none the worse for them. He always took himself out of town for week-ends of golf and vigorous exercise, and came back as a giant refreshed to new labours—those labours for the working poor.

Sometimes Clo went with him on these week-end visits to smart country houses: sometimes she stayed at home and drove down after church to Walworth, where her little settlement had assumed ample proportions. Her club meetings now filled two houses and she was negotiating for a third. Dorcas Deane had become paid superintendent, having undertaken this work in place of her former post as Mission woman, though she still got in as much district work as ever by some wonderful rule by which she always seemed to have more time for others than anybody else. Three hundred children were on their books for assistance and instruction. The tattered things, whose hours out of school they so cheerfully provided for, came begging daily with a new companion to be admitted as a member: small things in fluttering rags, with boots that sagged at the sides and gaped in the front showing little blue toes: things with matted hair and eyes like Maltese terriers and thin gruff voices—little human marmosets, very hungry, very ignorant, with no morals but much humour: with strange words, and yet, by the oddest of laws, good manners.

Cockney slum babies have such good manners, if you speak to them kindly—one wonders how and why?

"Please'm," such an imp would say, pushing out a dirty paw and looking shrewdly up at the pretty, pretty lady like a doll all in fur and silks who smiled down at her so softly, "please'm can I join the Club? I wants some boots—look, me toes comes through. I'm very nungry, an' I've got a brother at 'ome very nungry. Eh?"

"I will see," Chloris would answer, "but you know our Club is not to give you boots but to make you grow up into good men and women."

"Yes," the marmoset would answer with a grin.

"And do you think you could do that?" says Chloris.

"Yes, when I gets a pair o' boots an' something good to eat," replied the convert-to-be; "my brother's very good a'ready, but still he's very nungry."

To such as these Clo could not turn a deaf ear. Another, a thin old man of nine years old, with an ancient, long, skeleton's face and great fever-haunted eyes, dressed in what once was a sailor suit with a bit of tattered Nottingham curtain lace where the flannel front should be, came and asked admittance, even as a Spanish grandee might have asked it, with a still stateliness.

"Ah, dear heart," said Dorcas Deane, in

ready tears, "he came last night in the rain and sleet. I told him to come again to see you. He has no shirt—and, dear God, he has no childliness left in him. In heaven he will be a child—here he is an old, old man." Her voice broke.

Clo drew him to her.

"What is this?" she said. "Have you no shirt?" She felt his thin sailor blouse through which his tiny ribs were easily distinguished by the hand. He had a body like a stick.

"No, ma'am," he answered primly, in Quixote's own manner, "and the weather is cold, is it not?"

It was a blizzard. But the tone, the air, the grace were those of a courtier to a duchess. Chloris, too, lost her voice. She sent Dorcas for some flannel clothes her friends supplied her with, or paid for. She gave him little sets of these. He took them with stateliness yet gratitude.

"Thank you," he said, lifting his peaky face and looking at her between blinking red eyelids, "I will put one on at once."

"Aren't they a little large for him?" said Clo to Dorcas.

"They will allow me to grow, ma'am," said the scraggy imp, proudly hugging them.

"If the world will," said Dorcas, solemnly, under her breath.

## CHAPTER XV

ONE day, when Clo was busy in her morning-room answering endless notes of invitation, Mark came into the room in his quick, bustling fashion and asked to speak to her. He had not troubled her with his presence in her own part of the house for many a long day, and she looked up eagerly to see if anything were wrong.

"It's about your presentation," he said. "I want you to go to the next Court."

"I go to Court?" she said. "Could I, Mark?"

"Could you? What couldn't my wife do?" he asked a little sharply.

"Well," said Clo, meditatively, "of course the Woollenscheims went last time, and—"

"The Woollenscheims? Those Judy Jewesses with their red wigs and thick tongues? What will you say next? Remember you are a woman of position and importance as my wife, and please do try to live up to it. It will help me for you to be presented—that should be enough."

"I always wanted to help you in your great work, Mark," she said, "I'm trying now. Of course I'll go. How will it help the poor children? Will the King—"

"Really," he said, "I cannot quite explain. It would take too long. But it will help—er—"



er—all of our plans. Oh! and Lady Listower will present you—in fact, she has offered.”

“How kind of her!” cried Clo.

“Yes, she seemed to be positively urgent about it. She’s got some motive in that connection—can’t quite make out what it is. Never mind, so long as it fits in with my wishes.”

“Kindness,” said Clo, “kindness would be all her reason. You know what a dear she is.”

“Kindness,” said Mark, turning to go; “that’s all you know of the world! Very likely, indeed,” he laughed shortly. “However, consult her about your dress, and spare no expense. I want you to look your best and do me every possible credit.”

Clo flushed. It was so long since he had even taken a passing interest in her looks; he was too busy, too full of plans. And since that bitter night at the Prime Minister’s she had solemnly and silently put away all hope that he ever would again. Clo was a hopelessly inarticulate woman. She had never mentioned that night, or what she had heard, to Mark, or indeed anyone. She was too dumb where her heart was deeply concerned; she could never have been the screaming heroine of our *matinée* melodrama. Her words were fewest when her heart was most sad.

But she was very expeditious in making her plans for the presentation, which excited her pleasurably to think about. And she hurried to Little Chudleigh Street quite early one

morning (about 11.45) to catch Lady Listower before her morning drive for a word or two's advice.

My lady was not down, said the man; she would appear directly, however. Clo was shown into the study, a wide and beautiful apartment, where Bunny was seated drinking, with great solemnity, a glass of iced water, and staring out of the window at an exhilarating view of drab brick stables and roofs.

"Oh! but how do you do, Mrs Hading?" said Bunny, leaping up and offering Clo a chair. His real name was Bentinck—Lord Bentinck Vade. The name of Bunny was most unsuited to his door-handle countenance.

Clo greeted him cordially. The two boys and she were on excellent terms.

"Jove," said Bunny, "what a day! What a beastly day."

"I thought it lovely," said Clo, glancing out at the bright May sunshine. "I walked across the Park."

"Well, I'm taking up a new cure," said Bunny, thoughtfully.

"For what?" asked Clo.

"For what? For everything. Things are so rotten. Good Lord, don't everyone agree things are rotten? Life's all wrong."

"I like life," ventured Clo.

"You do?" he said, staring at her with his globular eyes. "You really look as if you did. Ah, you see now, that's your yeoman blood—the middle classes have us there. You are not

offended, are you? You yourself once said something of the sort to me. But it's our blue blood—our blue blood that plays the very Dickens."

"Oh, I do not mind," answered Clo, "only I really do not think the middle classes would own me. Still, do you take iced water—or is it iced Seltzer?—to cure blue blood?"

"No, no, only to thin it," answered Bunny, sadly; "this is my theory. Look at the Americans—they live on iced water, now, don't they? American women and all that. Now see what nerve they've got—(I haven't a rag of nerve)—look what physique they have, what keenness, what dash. And they live on iced water. Now, when I come to think of it, you look a bit like an American woman. Do you ever take iced water?"

Clo laughingly disclaimed. She said she was afraid it was purely plebeian blood.

"I think," said Bunny, surveying her solemnly and holding the empty glass in his hand, "I must marry a plebeian woman. By Jove! they're like goddesses—you are now."

At this moment Lady Listower came fussing and rustling into the room, all furs and silks and jingles.

"Go away, Bunny," she said crossly, "don't be silly. Mrs Hading hates you—you're a great nuisance, and very disgusting with your iced rubbish."

Bunny, of the grey, resigned countenance, got up and went, aimlessly smiling quite

tenderly upon both his mother and her visitor, and quite unruffled by his dismissal. Lady Listower sat down, puffing.

"My son Creek," she said, holding out a coroneted letter gingerly, a letter in huge feminine handwriting, "has another child, as you have, of course, seen in the *Times*." She would not admit that Lady Creek had greatly assisted in the matter. "That means a present. Are you going the Stores way? and will you drive with me there?"

Clo assented and they drove together through the gay streets and dancing wind and sunshine, attracting attention enough on their way to satisfy the vainest of mortals.

"Creek," continued her ladyship, whose mind was thus hampered by her obnoxious elder son who had disinherited Henry, "Creek was born on just such a morning as this. He was a puny, poor little thing. We never thought he would get over the chicken-pox; but he did, and now he's where dear Henry with his talents ought to be."

Clo, with a vague impression from this that Viscount Creek still bore traces of chicken-pox, agreed cheerfully.

"May," said Lady Listower, "is a bad month to be born in. That's the second baby they've had—another chance less for dear Henry. I must buy it something, I suppose, in case it lives. A cheap manicure set, say, or flannels, or something really useful. I think," said the proud grandmother, "something useful



with a Stores discount off it would bore *anyone*, don't you?"

Clo thought it would. Then she grew bolder.

"But your little sweet," she said, "he cannot be bored yet, can he? And suppose, dear Lady Listower, only suppose if later on he grew to resemble Lord Henry? He might, you know."

This view had never struck her ladyship.

"Well, so he might," she said slowly. "I think I'll see before I send him that Stores present. Timmins—the Park."

They wheeled round as suddenly as the idea struck her, and made for the Park. Chloris reminded her about the Court. She was only too ready to be interested. They were passing Bond Street and she made the long-suffering Timmins abandon the Park and drive up that pregnant thoroughfare to her own Court dressmaker for a long consultation. After half an hour, when they emerged from this palace, tired but victorious, her ladyship said,—

"You will look lovely, you nice thing!—a dream. I told your husband that I insisted on his letting me take you as I hear that that horrible old Julia Mount Amor" (mentioning a well-known Marchioness) "is taking that ugly girl of her sister, Anne Cartney—you know the one that had the scandal about her in the 'Seventies—no, you won't remember—before your time. Tiresome woman, with a tongue.

Had to go on her knees to get the great Julia to do it, though. And the girl's fat, with turned-in toes, and a voice like a banjo; and her mother's own spite. What a world it is!"

Clo agreed that it was certainly diverting.

"I think it's dull," said Lady Listower, heavily; "it's all new to you, and all that. You won't always find it funny. If you'd been, like me, to every Court in Europe, you wouldn't have a laugh left—not a smile. Women are such cats—and men are no better. This precious girl of Anne Cartney's set her cap at dear Henry—think of it! The impudence. Dear Henry! But happily the sweet child escaped."

Clo meditated that escape from a pair of turned-in toes, a voice like a banjo, extreme bulk and spite, need not have been regarded as Galahadian, but she forbore to say so.

The day of the presentation arrived and brought with it to this child of small beginnings real, genuine, delicious excitement. She had been coached in her "paces," she had received odd tags of advice from Lady Listower, and sarcastic advice from Pegram. Lord Listower told her she could not go wrong if she were quite naturally herself.

"Do not forget," he said, smiling inanely, "or try to forget, the flesh-pots of Walworth. That would ruin you and give you a 'risen' look—a fatal, fatal look, my dear. Recollect, even in the ante-room if you like—even in the Throne Room—who and what you really are.

Think of rabbit-skins. Think of dirty children—the children you try to help. I assure you it is good advice I am giving you. The recollection of one's naked soul in no way ruins the complexion: and it certainly helps to steady the head. It is most unfortunate that I find myself preaching to one so pretty. Positively I am growing old."

It is a necessary part of this story to relate that Clo's dress was lovely: dress is not so unimportant a factor in life as the superior person would have us believe. All dress is symbolic, of course, and a Court gown can be very symbolic indeed. Of all others it reveals the reality of the woman who wears it. There is something in the long, simple lines, the stately train, the plumed head, the veil, the air of robed mystery which seems completely to give away those who have no mystery of the right sort to robe and to set forth in new majesty those who were all along worthy of such a setting. The fussy, lower middle-class whilom Jewess, who makes such a noise and screams so about herself, and "runs down" her friends, and dies to outshine them; and calls honest Nathan "Norton," and Moses "Moss," and Daniels "Danvers," shrivels a little in Court attire. You met her yesterday, half buried in her furs, whirling through the Park, whereon her beady black eyes shone vivaciously under her Paris hat, and she produced a sense of good looks, of pomp and splendour. To-day she comes, as she indeed can afford to

come, to Court. Why is she smaller in that great glistening white robe? Why is her very stature less? Why do you now see the real hook of her otherwise pleasantly aquiline nose? Why is her dark hair so suddenly coarse and frizzed? And why, oh, why, is she suddenly too short from hip to toe, and too long in the back? Perhaps it is because this chaste regal attire will not go well with hard, eager eyes, lips tight and grinning and spasmodic with the greed to be first, first, first. Oh! unit in this vast brave universe, if you could only take your place as a unit, how you might evolve into the very thing you strive for and now fail utterly to get through striving.

It is not "preaching"—it is absolute, logical fact that the mind and soul are part and parcel of human beauty. Clo came from a stock no better, and certainly not so old as this Israelitish lady, whose forbears were possibly some of the finest, most noble and self-sacrificing men of that alien, that dignified, that brilliant and law-abiding people. But the last two generations of Nathan had been Norton—they began to be so when they left Kilburn for Regent's Park: and their late move to Park Lane confirmed it. And they are ashamed of Nathan, and shame of that sort is very unbecoming.

Clo's father was a poor printer in Walworth, but he taught himself considerably more than Eton and Oxford together can teach many persons, by plodding with blinking eyes and weary, horny hands at little grubby books at



night classes—and he lived a very straight, if a very dull, life. And Clo, too, blindly, and stupidly, and inarticulately, had tried to teach herself the “better part,” or her human, slow conception of it. Poor Clo. She was not brilliant. You never could make her talk much. But just now, in the gala-lighted house in Queen’s Gate, coming down the stairs, followed by chattering, fluttering maids holding up her immense train, she was a sight to dream of, not to see. It was not only the billowing away of that sea of softly-glistening foam; not the long, undulating line from neck to foot of perfect grace, nor her undoubted beauty; it was a queenliness in her kind eyes, her stately brow; a look of lovely purpose in a face designed for loveliness; a look of serenity, of gentleness, of calm. A look you cannot put on at once to suit an occasion, but a record of weeks and months and years of higher, gentler things. She wore pearls and diamonds set in silver, and her hair was dressed *à la* Elizabeth of Austria. To night she looked like the “Blessed Damozel” of Rossetti in a mist.

Lady Listower was to call for her. The time still allowed her a few minutes. She turned and sailed into the drawing-room. On a satin sofa, upright, red and hysterical, sat Mrs Tombs, staring at the door from between the waving tumult of jet earrings. By the fireplace sat Dorcas Deane with folded hands. And standing with his back to it, an air of real happiness on his ruddy countenance, stood Sir

Samuel Crawshay, his red curls shining, and his immaculate evening array contrasting oddly with his companions. As the ecstatic vision of Clo entered the room this odd group simply gazed, Crawshay coming forward to say he had called to see Mark, who told him he might wait to greet her before going. He explained that Mark was there a minute ago but had had to go somewhere in a hurry.

"He did not know these ladies, I think," said Crawshay, unconsciously sardonic.

Clo went up to Mrs Tombs, her arms out, and kissed her heartily. She did the same to Dorcas Deane, who was very white and still, and wore a look of deep thoughtfulness.

"My two dears," said Clo, simply, "have you waited for me long? I am so sorry. I told you the time but I fear I am late. These things take some getting into, you see."

Mrs Tombs was too tremulous to speak, gazing at Clo as in a dream. Crawshay answered, "We have had a most interesting conversation, all about the Prince Consort. This lady told me much about him that I have never heard before. We all amused ourselves. We wanted to see you but we have not been dull. Now we are quite content."

He said this beamingly and frankly in his almost boyish way. But Clo was dimly conscious that he was covering something up, purposely.

"Where did you say Mark has gone?" she asked him.

"Can't say, Mrs Hading. He went off suddenly. I'm afraid I didn't catch where. He'll be back soon enough—you've got some minutes yet."

Clo rang for refreshment for her two women guests, though they were both too startled and too abashed to partake.

"Now, look here, Mrs Tombs," said Crawshay, who insisted at this juncture upon an introduction to both in great form, "you must have some wine. I'll tell you, now—I'm a man who must have such things sociably, yet how can I take mine if you refuse yours? I'll tell you what—you'll drive me to having it all by myself in dreadful places called Blue Pigs and Green Lions and Mottled Unicorns. You wouldn't have that on your conscience, now, would you?"

Mrs Tombs smiled faintly, a little restored by the great familiarity of this "Duke."

"Ain't she *lovely*?" she said in a whisper, taking her wine, while Crawshay touched her glass gallantly with his liqueur.

"Rather," said Crawshay.

"I never, never saw her likes," went on the old soul.

"No, by Jove! Neither didn't I," said Crawshay, slipping cheerfully into the highly-spiced negative vernacular.

"No, not never," added Mrs Tombs in rapture.

Clo was talking to Dorcas Deane and did not hear her two adorers' prolonged pæan.

"She was always a young person as had

points," went on Mrs Tombs, "but now she's—she's—well, she ain't a 'person' at all!"

"No, I shouldn't call her a 'person,'" said Crawshay, looking again at the vision; "that doesn't seem to describe her, eh?"

"No, not it," said Mrs Tombs, "she's a real lady now—and more'n that. She's more than brass-plate person either. She's got the stamp of the Real High Family."

Crawshay folded his arms and looked profound.

"Why, yes," he said, "that's about it. You've hit it."

"She's, she's," said Mrs Tombs, becoming inspired to growing oracular, "she's of the Front Rank Proper."

"That's it," said Crawshay, slapping his knee. "Sounds heraldic. Do you know anyone in the Heralds?"

"Do I?" said Mrs Tombs, "No, sir—not as I suppose what you mean, though I had a musical box brought me by the late Mr Tombs when I was first married as could play 'Hark the Herald Angels sing' beautiful and had a picture of the Crystal Palace on the lid—but it was stole by a friend. Leastways, he wasn't no friend, though he did come in to supper every night for two months and talk moral. But the Herald Angels will be what you're meanin'?"

"No," said Crawshay, thoughtfully, "I shouldn't call them angels, and they can't sing. You wouldn't think so if you'd heard them proclaim the King off the top of St James's Palace."



"There now," said Mrs Tombs, agreeably. But she closed the conversation, feeling suspicious of something faintly unorthodox in this view of angels, and dimly conscious that this "Duke" was a little wanting in reverence, or else painfully misinformed—either a very sad state of mind for one so gallant.

At this juncture Lady Listower's carriage was announced, and Clo kissed her old friends again, promising to come and see them on the morrow and tell them all about it.

Mrs Deane withheld the too ecstatic Mrs Tombs from crushing Clo's splendour in a warm embrace, rather crumby and somewhat sticky : and the Vision sailed away from these dangers downstairs to the carriage, escorted by Sir Samuel and a troop of anxious servants half off their heads with anxiety over her train.

It was Sir Samuel who saw the two humble visitors off when the Listower carriage had driven away, and instead of putting them in the 'bus they asked for, insisted on placing them in a cab and settling with the man on a scale to make him call out dramatic if husky blessings till he rounded the corner into Kensington Gore. An incident for ever after to be added to Mrs Tombs's collection of stories of the "old days" for the regaling of endless tea-parties to come.

The presentation of Clo was a string of triumphs. She created a sensation even in the waiting-room, where the packed crowd of fluttering white goddesses awaited their summons, who were all, until then, instinctively thinking

solely and wholly about themselves and the impression they would make. Lady Listower, even in this crush, saw some friends to whom she waved and gesticulated but could not reach, all being rooted to the spot they stood on by their trains.

"That girl" of Anne Cartney was pointed out to Clo with much scorn, standing by the redoubtable Julia, Marchioness of Mount-Amor. A little sad-eyed, rather shocked-looking person, for whom Clo felt a genuine kindly pity, but at whom Lady Listower, seeing only the hated mother in the plain child, snorted openly.

Then their turn came. Clo remembered Lord Listower's advice but could not get on with it. As she sailed along between the lines of coloured uniforms towards the Throne Room she forgot herself altogether, remembering only that she was going to see the Queen and that her husband had not seen her off or even wished her good luck. Perhaps this is sentimental. After what she had overheard Mark say that night at the Prime Minister's she ought, had she wished to be thought a reasonable woman at all, have gone round telling it to every woman she knew, and then never cared for him again. But she was not good at tragedy. She was genuinely sorry Mark had not seen her. She wanted to please him—it was strange he had not wanted to look at her—one look. Then into her simple mind came the thought, "But I mustn't look depressed or I shall not do him justice now." Her features unconsciously

brightened at the unselfish thought, and when she reached the royal group a glow of sweetness rested upon them, giving her beauty a finish nothing else could have produced. Every eye was upon her, though she did not know it—she was only thinking now of the Queen.

The Prince, it was heard afterwards, remarked her resemblance to Elizabeth of Austria, and a great duchess pronounced her by far the most beautiful woman present, or indeed in London. The Austrian Ambassador asked people leading questions about her, and wildly sought her origin, himself infatuated. She came away, leaving a sort of emotional hush after her like a trail of glory, even in that high place.

When they bundled themselves, trains and all, into the carriage and came away, Lady Listower was in quite gay spirits.

"Splendid, my good child, splendid," she said. "I always said you were an original soul. To-night you surpassed yourself. Poor Julia!"

When she got to Queen's Gate, Mark was in his study waiting for her, as usual writing those interminable letters. There was a whisky-and-soda at his side. He looked flushed.

When she came in he looked up hardly and unsmilingly, but the vision perhaps took him by surprise, for his face relaxed and he wheeled round his swivel chair to get a better view.

"By Gad! you're stunning, Clo," he said. Here was a reward at last.

She came over impulsively and kissed him.

Somehow he drew away. It was long since they had done such childish things as that.

"Stand back and let me look at you," he said in his masterful way, and rising himself to see her better.

"Do you like it?" she asked, pleased. He asked her all about her experiences. He ordered refreshment for her. He was quite assiduous and very kind. But he had drawn away from her kiss.

"You've really done me justice this time," he said with great blandness.

"I hope I always shall," said this meek woman, just a little wistfully.

"Yes—ah," he paused, "but there was something which annoyed me to-day. Whoever asked those two awful women here to-night? I declare when I got into the drawing-room and saw them, I—"

"Awful women?" said Clo. "Mrs Tombs, poor old soul, and Mrs Deane? Oh, Mark, you can't call dear Dorcas 'awful.' Why, she is your old friend. And look how devoted she is to you and to your interests—and to the children."

"That is not the point. Who asked them? Did you?"

"Of course I did, dear. It was such a pleasure to them to come and see me. They were so kind about it, too."

"Kind? My good girl, when will you learn who's who and what's what? Kind? Slum people? What have you to do with their kind-



ness?" She looked so amazed and hurt that he added: "Of course they mean well. Mrs Deane is a most respectable person. I always did admire her character immensely, but you know, dear, it gives *me* away when you treat such people as friends. It lowers *me*. Do remember that. And Crawshay saw them—there's the worst sting. The servants seeing them was bad enough—but Crawshay!"

"Crawshay saw you, Mark, when you had only one pair of boots, and me when I did the washing at home, and when Dorcas was my lodger."

"Clo," he answered, "you are positively low in your tastes and speech. I must say it. Lady Vera says women always do cling much more obstinately to a vulgar past than men, and—"

"Lady Vera?" said Clo, her face flushing in a steady flow down to her neck till she was hot all over, "did she say that of me, Mark?"

"I can't say just now quite who she said it about," he answered, dropping his eyes and playing with a silver paper-knife in assumed carelessness, "she certainly said it. But one thing I must have—you must give up these people, Clo. You must not go to them again."

Clo stood up very still and tall and white.

"Mark," she said, "I will not give them up. They need not come here, but I shall go to see them. I cannot obey you in this."

"You have forgotten yourself," he said angrily, rising.

"No," she answered quietly and sadly, "it is you who have forgotten."

## CHAPTER XVI

IN a gay garden, radiant with summer flowers—streaks of flame-red geraniums broken by gleaming white terraces, and long shades of sable yew—walked Vera, romantically dreaming. She was all in diaphanous creamy white, with a large soft sash or scarf of saffron yellow, a tan haymaker's hat decorated with field buttercups. She was the picture of musing maidenhood—the distance, say, of a terrace away—and appeared to have walked out of a Reynolds, until you got near enough to see that her hair was not her own and that her eyebrows were uncomfortably murky. Also that her pensive lips were carmined. Still, this quiet musing in the dusky shade of dark-clipped firs and cloistered alleys of velvet yews had a most dreamy and beautiful effect, and overcame entirely an initial tendency in the beholder to remember that the lady was only just down from her breakfast (it was 12.30), so Arcadian she looked and such a wonderful “up with the lark” way she had of holding her hat by its strings.

Followed by two dogs with no apparent fur on them, and not unlike rats, to which creatures she occasionally chirped hopeless nonsense in a thin, high voice, she met two women—fellow-guests at this refreshing Sussex retreat. To these she was jerkily vivacious with abstracted

eyes, gushing between them and the dogs, and half closing her heavy eyelids with a smiling boredom patent to her two acquaintances, who were both busy studying her with that hideous frankness that has made so many social meetings a kind of vulgar market, wherein certain mutual advantages or disadvantages are openly appraised.

One of these ladies, in a frightful toque which, with her frightfully-dressed hair, she took to signify extreme moral elevation, looked upon Vera with a really nasty smile, which gave her the excuse of appearing sociable the while she studied that lady's *tout ensemble*. The other, herself more clearly designed for general fascination, and succeeding not ill in that quite reasonable end, chatted to Vera with a certain gaiety and good-humour, recognising between them a vague mutual kinship. But Vera remained amiably remote, and the two passed on to tear her to pieces for the next quarter of an hour, and outvie one another in insidious attacks on her character, her complexion, her dress and her age; and to each hint with cleverness that her hair was dyed, yet hint yet more strongly that the other would have hair that colour if she could.

But Vera, with a shrug, sailed on. And when in the distance she saw, as she seemed to expect, a tall manly figure approaching along one of the yew paths, she turned very gracefully to a rose-tree at her side and proceeded to reach up a thin if white arm to gather a

Gloire de Dijon that nodded against the blue. Her billowy cream dress, her slender form, her brown hair in *négligé*, a little more Titian red in tint than formerly, a little foot put out, she made a charming study against the dark yews, a study to utterly melt the heart of a Society photographer.

The approaching man came to the rescue. It was Stillingfleet, who was staying at this week-end gathering of bridge players with her brother Henry. The rose was quickly gathered by this gentleman, who deftly kissed it, or rather touched it against his long curly moustache, and placed it in Vera's hand with a bow. Anything more like a shop-walker it is hard to imagine. But this effect was lost on Vera, usually the most cruelly, coldly critical of mortals; and only the flattery of this ready entering into her own pose struck her, happily for Stillingfleet. She thanked him in a sweet, soft way, and put the rose in her dress, where it really looked very charming. They walked along the subdued path together.

"Ah," she said, sighing a little, "I have been dreaming of many things. Life—life!—what a thing it is!"

"Ah, yes," answered he, "what an enigma."

She sighed again and looked yearning. "We seek to fly so high, and so often fall and drag our wings in the dust," she continued; "a morning like this, so fresh, so innocent, so primeval, makes me think," she said deeply. "I long for what I know not. How hollow things are, Mr Stillingfleet."



It was 12.45 and her companion was wishing for his lunch, so he agreed with this quite spontaneously.

"Ah, yes," he replied, "The little more how much it is. A sigh too short and a kiss too long—"

"At length it ringeth to evensong," she misquoted dreamily, happily unconscious that she was making a wild mistake, and oblivious of the fact that a kiss lasting till evensong would really and truly come under the heading of too much of the "little more."

Stillingfleet, equally too busy with his own pose (he had been æsthetic in the 'Eighties at a time when that hydrophobia had attacked the suburbs, and he could still call up many dark and drear hints as to a misunderstood soul when occasion really required), did not notice the misquotation either. He only reflected that they were getting on famously and proceeded to rack his brains for something neat and depressing from Omar Khayyam with which to continue the conversation. Failing dismally to do this—the life of a political agent and secretary is not strewn with the fairest flowers of quotation—he sighed deeply instead.

"So sad?" said Vera, whose head had been perched on one side like a bird's for some minutes while her eyes were veiled by her long lashes, as she had read was very effective in the literature she patronised. She now raised the lashes and let her large eyes rest full, if inanely, on Stillingfleet's.

But he was pulling his moustache with great care, and was so busy trying to think of what she would expect him to say, that he forgot what she would expect him to look. Therefore it was an abstracted glance which met hers, for the soul of the poor wretch was away in a suburban back garden in the 'Eighties and he was delving in his dusty mind after some fragments of the Rubaiyat that would get mixed up with "I never loved a dear gazelle" and "willow willow wally"; in a floating vision of a lawn and four or five large sunflowers and clothes hung out to dry.

At this apparent inattention Vera turned and tossed and pouted, and hurried her steps a little. This trick also always had done good business on the stage so far as she could see. It ought to do it now. Pettishness is so fascinating.

"Why are you so cruel?" said Stillingfleet, who didn't really want to know, but had to say something. He was positively hungry—surely it was lunch-time? Lady Vera was sometimes inconsiderate.

"Cruel?" she said, raising her eyebrows coldly; she had suddenly decided to be Lady Clara Vere de Vere, a *rôle* she was always rather fond of assuming—hence her flirtations with her obvious inferiors, her intention being to have them all dying of love for her yet scorned. Also, as she had only just had breakfast, Stillingfleet's dream of lunch did not come nigh her.

"Yes," said he, getting a little desperate and

measuring the paces between their position and the house with his eye half-unconsciously, to see how much more semi-lovemaking would be expected of him before he could escape in to lunch, "cruel. Why do you get yourself so talked about with Hading? You do, you know. What do you see in him?"

This was really spiteful. It came straight from a primeval source—namely, the simple rancour of man baulked of his dinner. But Vera took it for a furious and seething jealousy, long hidden, but now surging forth in a fearsome torrent. Instantly she was much more Lady Clara Vere de Vere, with the air of the very most bored of bored "Gibson" girls. Her chin went up and her heavy eyelids fell (in books this pose is said to be "tantalising"). Stillingfleet must have really found it so, though perhaps in the wrong sense, for he said, quite curtly and rudely,—

"I suppose he's coming down here to-day? *You* should know."

"He is," she answered, with the goddess look she admired so much. "He is like all the others. They are all the same, poor fools!"

She took a note from her dress and waved it carelessly. It was in Hading's handwriting. This was dramatic.

But Stillingfleet looked nasty. So long as he was the honoured one, singled out by Lord Henry's sister for undue notice, and feeling the thrill of perilous intrigue adding its weight to his already solid conviction of his own tailor's

dummy fascinations all was well. But the idea of sharing this post with Hading, who was quite without his own dreamy, wax-doll graces, who wore no waving moustache and hadn't "killing" eyes, only hard ones; who could not waltz divinely, and who talked over much and who bragged about talents that unfortunately he really possessed, was most repugnant to him. Nearly as repugnant as being expected to flirt in a hot sun, amongst geraniums and calceolarias, and beastly little dogs, when you were desperately hungry and lunch was waiting. So he did a very ordinary trick of simple masculinity. He suddenly wanted to kill something. He picked up a stone and threw it viciously at some bushes on a flower-bed, where he saw some small creature moving. A yelp was the result, followed by a scream from Vera. The moving object was one of the rat-like dogs. The yelp swelled out into a series of howls and bellows, so that several servants, the host and some of the party came upon the scene, to behold the tragic sight of Vera embracing her little animal, which was not at all hurt, and Stillingfleet, in agonies of professed remorse but secret temper, trying to get out of the *mêlée* without swearing audibly. It is unwise to try to flirt before lunch.

But if Vera's curtain-raiser was a failure, her after sally was a *coup-de-main*. Later in the afternoon, when most of the party were at golf and some asleep, Mark Hading arrived. He was alone. Hewasalsomuchpreoccupied, and looked



distinctly cross and ill-humoured as he entered the cool hall from the blaze of heat without.

His hostess, Mrs "Pan" Vannerheim—his host was a painfully dull millionaire with a pretty and gay wife—had left a message for him, should he arrive in her absence, that Lady Vera was to be counted her substitute. He had not announced the time of his arrival, and in any case the house was proud of its "Liberty Hall" character.

When he came in, then, from the white blaze of the afternoon sun he found the wide hall a bower of green stillness, and in it but one occupant—Vera, in a soft robe of pearl grey, reading a book bound with gold stamped leather.

This quite cloistral vision—Vera had on a plain muslin collar like a widow's, and wore her hair severely—had the effect of suddenly soothing his nerves. She greeted him quietly, with a cool, if long, pressure of the hand, ordered a few things from the waiting servants in a quiet voice, the voice of a dreaming abbess, saw to his wants, provided for his comfort, and remained, what so few women could remain under the circumstances, deliciously subdued, and gentle, and remote. Hading hated fussiness, and just now, when he was hot and dusty, he would have shown temper at it. But Vera was so soothing. When he went to wash and change his travel-stained clothes he reflected upon this—the wonderfully understanding nature of this woman : her calmness, her serenity, the comfort she shed with her.

It was significant of his ideals that he had once felt the same thing about the Mission woman, Dorcas Deane. At home he had left a sense of jar ; Clo and he had jarred vaguely for months. His public life, just now, was the same. He was done to death with deputations, questions, conundrums, angry meetings and the insults of his ungrateful constituents. There were some big practical trade questions coming along after the approaching vacation, and he, with others, would have to meet them. The Press, too, was "roasting" him pretty freely for his changes of front, his unfulfilled promises, the largeness of his talk, the smallness of his accomplishments. Added to these joys, conscience and his liver were both also at work alternately, and he was in something of the position of a man goaded to madness by a swarm of flies when, on this blazing afternoon, he had managed to tear himself away and dash down to Chassingham, Vannerheim's country seat, for a few days' peace.

He came down to tea *tête-à-tête* with that most calm and cool Vera in a peaceful frame of mind for the first time for a fortnight, and feeling a sense of great blandness steal over his harassed faculties. It is so nice to be understood. It was restful in the shade of palms and wet ferns and the soft sound of plashing water to forget the piping heat of the London pavements, the rush of men's angry tongues and reiterated, stupid questions, and to remember only this calm present and Vera's tactful eyelashes.

Of these great use was made. Conversation was an airy fantasy, and sweet grave ideas, skirting round about his own life questions, yet not too crudely definite, fell lightly from Vera's prudently-carmined lips, and made him feel at more ease with himself. She was reading a modern French writer on Sociology, she said, and she just lightly quoted ideas here and there in a graceful, half-idle way (the ideas were all scored underneath in violet pencil in the book—they were all she had dreamed of reading of its wisdom, by-the-bye). All these quotations had a beautiful way of justifying in poetic language Mark's own recent actions, about which his conscience had been so worrying and about which his country had invented such gross names. Absolutely this was a woman to help a man's ambitions in the right way. That was what kept crooning to him like a delightful under-song of consciousness all the time he listened to Vera, and looked at her sympathetic way of supporting her piquant chin on a long white hand, adorned by one immense sapphire, like a Cardinal's.

Clo could never be like this. Clo was so literal—dear girl ; good, of course, but so dull, so literal, so—so sledge-hammer like in her methods of doing right. It was so vulgar to be literal. Clo, in that way, bore the taint of their mutual small origin : she would never lose it. True, it gave her that still, candid look that people called stately, but it was boring, really boring, at home when things pressed a man as he was pressed and

worried, as men in his position were bound to be worried. You do not grow suddenly and immensely rich for nothing: and great newspaper combines are not things to make a man's head lie any easier than crowns, especially when conducted in conjunction with self-announced prophethood and a fairly recently-expressed intention of reforming London. Like most great reformers Mark hated ridicule, and just now he was in the very centre of it and fire of it. But here was a woman who took him and his aims quite seriously. So, for that matter, did his host and fellow-guests, but Vera had her own way of showing it. It was such a soothing way. Then she played to him very softly, and later on, when he was rested, and they had talked things over happily, she took him into the grounds, choosing the shady paths and terraces and keeping up her flow of sympathy, enhanced by the halo of a fluffy pale pink parasol and a cloudy chiffon garden hat.

Two of the party half-sleeping on the lawn in hammocks looked after them and called them "Una and the tame Radical," and snorted unsympathisingly. But the idyll went on, even to Vera gathering a Gloire de Dijon bud for Mark off the same tree from which Stillingfleet had culled one for her an hour or two before.

Later on, round the convivial dinner-table—Mrs "Pan" always collected cheery guests, unless they were lions, to whom she extended the privilege of behaving as they liked—Mark had recovered his old *rôle* to some extent, and



proceeded to deliver his brilliant dinner-table monologue as usual. He was exceptionally biting and witty in his allusions to several institutions, and even persons, and carried away his audience in a torrent of his incisive words. Nevertheless, there were some who looked at him queerly, and some of the men askance.

If he saw this, and sometimes he did, he rushed on more roughly for the pet corns of the Universe in general and spared no one and nothing in the stream of his dogmatic utterance. He was the great man, they must all keep silent. They knew this, but it did not delight their hearts, and somehow the great man was sometimes very little indeed in his hasty judgments; in the utter superficiality of his statements, the sweeping want, not only of charity but of accuracy in his red-hot condemnations. Reforming, as a business, may become a real bore.

Afterwards, when bridge claimed every other person in the place for three hours' steady, eager gamble, Vera, who had been playing high stakes for a week, withdrew herself from the feverish throng and glided to a place within Mark's vision—he was still blustering to Mr Vannerheim and a friend—and stood and looked thoughtful near a clump of Madonna lilies and some rare books on a table over by one of the wide windows. Outside a June moon was shining calmly. Whereupon Mark went to her and devoted to her the whole of the evening, staying deep in conversation even when the winners

and losers, with tired eyes, began to make for bed.

On the staircase, near the door of her room, the hostess, the gay Mrs "Pan," stood a second chatting to a woman friend before retiring. The millionaire's wife was a little woman with a charming turn-up nose and Irish eyes, and celebrated feet, slang and furs.

"What is that old Vera Vade doing now?" said the friend, a matron twice Vera's age but content to call her old because she was not married, after the feminine custom.

"Oh, that!" said Mrs "Pan," "that's not new. She loves that horrid bearish creature to dangle after her. She made me ask him. I hate him myself."

"But what will it lead to?" persisted the friend. "What do you foresee?"

"Muddles."

"And then?"

"Scandals."

"And then?"

"Oh, something to talk about at breakfast one morning when one has been silly enough to get up for it," said Mrs "Pan," yawning.

"I thought he was religious—a fanatic," said the matron.

"So he was. But Vera would drive that out of anybody."

"A tawdry enchantress," said the friend.

"Very," said Mrs Vannerheim, "shabby finery. But success turned his head in the

first place, and Vera set it spinning. But the majority of people still swear by him."

"But her tricks are so old—so common," said the matron.

"What will not risen people do for a title?" said Mrs Vannerheim, who herself would have cut off her celebrated little nose for one.

"Hasn't he a beautiful wife?" said the other. "I hear she was raved about at the last Court."

"Yes—but dull," said Mrs "Pan." "Slow. Good. Socialist. Works for the poor. Horribly quiet woman—never has a word to say for herself. Can't get out of her common groove—she was somebody in a slum, you know. A regular bore."

"Oh, how dreary," said the matron. "No wonder, then, that he amuses himself. One has to."

## CHAPTER XVII

THIS time the lion at the house-party did not merely growl. He provided an immense amount of speculative gossip, to his own and Lady Vera's entire satisfaction.

There are some people who will never distinguish notice from admiration. Sufficient comment will always be in their eyes an outward and visible sign of an inward and entire greatness. Perhaps, in the majority of cases, it is a happy thing.

But Mark and Lady Vera, conducting a blatant form of intellectual and semi-spiritual flirtation in the very midst of a little coterie of busy gossipers, had a glory less innocuous, if more definite, in its manifestations. For the succeeding two or three days, wherever this pair moved or talked eager eyes followed them, and eager tongues discussed their infinite possibilities.

They were as well aware of this as were the gossipers themselves, but they were both perfectly convinced of the flattery involved in such preternatural notice and comment. They were both supremely confident that it was the natural tribute of greatness. Mark surmised it to be the result of his own tremendous name : Vera,



the result of her transcendent fascination. Of course they were both too absorbed to overhear the actual remarks of their fellow-guests, but even if they had they would have put these down to jealousy.

There was nothing so delightful to Vera as that sense of creating an occasion, a scene, a melodrama in the very midst of ordinary surroundings and people. She gathered great rapture from the performance of deep and significant glances, meaning tones, cryptic sentences and small signals, even where the recipient of such attentions was on the whole rather puzzled by them, as some of her obtuse admirers were.

But when the other party to the drama took the thing seriously, and gave signs of developing a vast array of dark sayings and signals himself on his own account, the lady was happy indeed.

To the raw, solid, literal mind of Mark, the mind of a business-like working-man, unused entirely to subtleties of any sort, the half-veiled meaning to be found in all Vera's sayings and actions had a tremendous fascination. It struck him as so brilliant, so marvellous, and yet so sympathetic, and he bowed to the spell of its enchantment as he was meant to do, feeling all the time that he was being most discerning and original in doing so. He felt, with pride, that he had discovered Lady Vera. Until he came, he said to himself, there had been no one to appreciate "that woman"

at her true worth. He did; she was worthy of him.

There is a certain trait so peculiar to unconvertible middle-classism that it stamps the scions of that great bulwark of the British Empire as indelibly as an ink-stamp on a receipted bill. And that is the absolute incapacity to realise that anyone can possibly say what he does not mean, or be what he does not profess to be. Again and again it is the unfortunate experience of the witty, and even of the wise, to be taken absolutely and literally, word for word, without benefit of clergy in the shape of extenuating circumstances, passing emotion, or any other quite reasonable ground for having said a certain thing. Mark Hading was, of course, of that class in which an utterance is taken strictly and in its entirety upon all occasions. His having risen in the world enough to mix with a class in whose lips words are bandied about so gracefully as to intentionally obscure one meaning to reveal another had in nowise cured him of this stolid attitude of mind. Like most clever persons who have "got on" in all respects save this one, he took his very inability to understand the witty banter and chatter of the world in which he found himself for virtue and strength of character. He raised his fine head proudly when a dinner-table conversation sparkled and glittered above his understanding. Did it not show his superior virtue, his natural seriousness of purpose, his sterner mould? Folly he called it, the folly of

the worldly and brainless. He was doing something in the world, something strong, and noisy and large. These brainless chatterers with their frivolous remarks, their words tossed lightly about from lip to lip across the table, to and fro and back again like tennis balls, were the wasters of life, its froth, its foam, they were not to be considered. The fact that some of them owned broad acres and ruled them faultlessly and finely did not come into Mark's philosophy at all. What was the good of doing great things if you did not talk about it? That silver-haired and foppish old baronet, his *vis-à-vis* at table, who owned immense and poverty-stricken lands, and half-supported dozens of wretched families out of his own lean purse, without saying a word about it one way or another, was that a man to be regarded as great or glorious? That was not Mark's idea. A great man had the eyes of England upon him; otherwise he was not great. He snorted at the very idea. Reformers often snort. Also, usually, they eat very fast, or else they want special food at a dinner-party, such as haricot beans, or hominy, or tiresome things in medical-looking utensils. Mark demanded peculiar mineral waters in odd-shaped glasses, and talked loudly about what "we" are doing for Imperialism across the table at the host before the women had left the room.

The women who did not look wistful or bored looked defiant. Only Vera's speaking eyes glowed, the intense rapture of an earnest-

mindful woman feeling herself in the very whirl of the creation of empires, and so on. She did it with a forefinger, decorated by a ring, supporting the middle of her cheek. It was what she would have mystically called an "understanding" look. Mark felt it, rather than saw it, and shouted on at his noisy propaganda, supported by the consciousness of "that woman's" silent sympathy and appreciation.

A very public flirtation on this system was not without its piquancy to the odd crew of somewhat vulgarly curious guests that the Vannerheims had got together. Every day its manifestations were intensified and the audience applauded.

"What *is* that woman doing?" said one feminine guest to another.

"My dear, ruling empires by tying a horrid political bear to her apron-string. I hope she likes him. I hate the square ends of his fingers."

"I hate his noble outlook on life," said the other. "It slops the soup so. You shouldn't eat soup and rave about your mission. I wish he would go. He talks like a mixture of a copy-book and an angry cabman. I suppose that is political reform."

"Oh, he's all right," put in Mrs Pan, cheerfully; "he's got lots of money, and he can do anything, pretty nearly, with these papers of his. I hate him, of course, but you can't judge your friends by that. That's nothing. He's rich and he's got influence. Besides, he's funny."



"He hasn't got the dimmest sense of humour," said the first speaker.

"No. That is why he doesn't love his wife—*she* hasn't," said another.

"Did he say that?" asked Mrs Pan.

"He told Vera Vade, and she told me," said the first speaker.

"Probably she invented it," said Mrs Pan, sagely. "The fact is, he is sick of his wife because she is nobody. That's all. He thinks poor old Vera is somebody. I don't know why he makes such a parade of it, anyhow. His wife never bothers him." She tilted up and examined her celebrated little foot thoughtfully.

"No, she is much too occupied with her children and her Crawshays," said the other, spitefully. "How that man can dance attendance on her and her deadly charities I don't know. Not that one knows her, really, only one hears of her through her looks. She is pretty in a dull, stately, solemn style, the kind of common queenly style that one associates with shop-girls and young persons at photographers. She isn't a bit interesting, and has no 'manner.' Crawshay is carrying his socialist pose a little too far, but I suppose he likes the romantic post of squire-in-waiting to such a pious stick. Fat men are always sentimental."

"Why, what does he do?" asked Mrs Pan, alert at once. "Is he often there?"

"Oh, well, he is interested in her charities and all that," said the other. "That's what

they call it, you know. But a woman whose husband leaves her alone so much and so long must have her special friend. Don't you agree, dear?" she said, addressing the third member of the group.

"Goodness gracious!" cried Mrs Pan, sitting up erect and pulling down her deep waistbelt at each side of her small waist mechanically and stroking down her skirt from the hips, "how very interesting these saints are! Who would have thought of that deadly Mrs Hading having any affairs of her own? Still waters always run deep, of course, but I really should have thought that good lady unimpeachable. She wears such hideous hats. And oh! her American boots!"

"Well, of course, they've got on from nothing, and I suppose that sort of thing will out," said one of her guests, pleasantly—Mrs Pan's father having been a Hebraic vendor of old clothes in the Mile End Road, by which means he made his wealth.

"But does she dress badly?" asked the other lady. "I heard she appeared in the most absurdly extravagant costumes on occasions, silver gowns and so on. Theatrical, I call it."

"Oh, you know what those vulgar, ill-balanced people will do," said Mrs Pan, the ever-smart and ever taut. "A gown fit for a duchess one day and some old blanket fit for a district visitor the next. I don't know why the Listowers took her up, except as a boring sort of

curiosity, with her slow, staring eyes and her dull pose of caring for slum children. Of course it is a very respectable pose and helps her on with that silly old Aunt Sally of a Lady Highgate, and that sort of fogey. All the most fearful old frumps in the Peerage are her friends and boon companions—a perfect crew! I never see her with her horrible old countesses and charity committee duchesses but I want to shy cocoanuts for a penny a shy at the whole lot of them. They turn up at the Opera in sage-green silk dinner-gowns and caps. One has an onyx brooch. My dear, I *saw* it. They are fearfully and wonderfully respectable. They wear ice-wool shawls over their heads at the play. Such guys I never saw!” She laughed very much in a very high key. The ladies in question had never received her in spite of her wealth and various fly-away talents. They were a very sore point indeed. Even Mrs Pan Vannerheim had not the power to push her impertinent and noisy little person everywhere. Her small nose with its sharp *retroussé* form, like the bowsprit of a ship, had forced its determined way into many sanctuaries. But certain highly English grand dames wore always a sort of steel-plated armour against its encroachments. Hence these sundry splashings.

During the evening the voice of the matron in the toque raised itself to a pitch exceedingly high and thin, and said across the room, where the guests were playing cards,—

"Mr Hading, how very unkind of you not to bring your *charming* wife. We have all heard so much about her. Why will you hide her from us in this way?"

The question fell athwart the groups of busy bridge players, and even reached the distant loo table, where a hot squabble was going on in strident tones. Mark glanced up at his interlocutor unpleasantly. He was reading at a table to himself.

"My wife is very busy," he said curtly.

"Good for you, old man," said a grey-haired man over his shoulder without troubling to turn his eyes from the eager scanning of his own bridge hand. "Wish mine was. That's the best sort of wife to have—always nicely occupied in town."

The weak cynicism had no personal meaning whatsoever. It was merely meant to be witty. But the unpleasant matron laughed meaningly.

"Oh, dear," she said, "what things you people say! Do you *allow* Mrs Hading to be occupied, Mr Hading? And does she tell you all she does?"

"Her work is well known," said Lord Henry from his table, where he was playing desperately with his hostess and a party. "It goes on as steadily as the brook. Only it is more than chatter."

"I see she has a champion," went on the repellent lady, bristling up at the compliment of having attracted the rather taciturn Lord Henry's attention. "Of course I know how



excellent she is. I heard of it from Lady Vera. Didn't you tell me all about Mrs Hading, Vera?"

Vera looked up from a distant piano where she was playing something dreamy and soft in the half lights of a ferny alcove. There was a certain tension of the atmosphere, perfectly discernible by herself, as her reply was awaited, though not a single player glanced up from his cards. She knew the entire room listened.

"Really," she said plaintively, "I am not the best authority. You must ask Sir Samuel Crawshay."

The significance of her voice was worse than the words.

"But *really*?" said the matron. "How very interesting. And he such a woman-hater too. Isn't he a woman-hater, dear?" (Vera had angled for him in the past, it was well known). "Dear Mr Hading, how very charming this lovely wife of yours must be to attract where others fail."

Now Hading was not in the habit of defending his wife, but he had got a dim suspicion that they were all in some way what he called "getting" at him by this semi-spiteful banter. He reserved to himself the right to regard his wife with contempt. In defence of his household, with the amount of himself that it involved, he could be quite as angry as anyone. He looked up sternly and meaningly at the matron.

"Mrs Hading does not go in for—er, pro-

fessional charms," he said in his harsh, grating voice. "She spends her time more sensibly."

"But how nice—and how clever to make dear Sir Samuel sensible too," said the creature.

"Good sense," remarked Lord Henry, musingly, his eyes on his cards, "is as you take it. We might quarrel about a definition, madame, but that I never quarrel with your most amiable sex. You are really too rocky."

The intervention saved an angry reply from Mark and took the uncomfortable lady to Lord Henry's side, where she elected to stay, flirting a fan, having conceived from his twice addressing her that she had made a distinct impression on him. So she had. He would willingly have seen her dropped into the sea with a weight round her neck.

But Mark got up and sought another room, there to smoke and to meditate on the poisonous hints the two women had dropped into his too-ready mind. Absurd as they were, Vera had prepared him for them. And now he listened to the voice of the tempter. His rich friends did not always give him unalloyed joy, though he would never have been brought to admit it. But now their spite had suggested a new thought, a new idea to his feverish, worried brain. It was an idea with possibilities. And he was not, he said to himself, a man to flinch at sentimental obstacles. It was to be thought of, at all events.

## CHAPTER XVIII

THE next day Vera's hostess managed to attach herself to the side of that sylph before Hading had the opportunity to take his accustomed place. It was not an easy feat, for Vera had a way of being oddly elusive when she had a flirtation in hand, as regards her own sex, and could usually manage to drop any over-affectionate and adhesive friend like a hot coal.

But hostesses have a pull over one, and Mrs Pan could stick like a burr if she had anything to say or to find out from a victim. She pounced on her prey with a wild fanfare of gush almost before Vera was aware of her tactics, and pushing a girlish arm into her captive's leant winningly on her and pushed her playfully and tenderly into the garden with many high trilling giggles. It was just after breakfast and the men were all dispersing—some had already dispersed—and Vera saw no rescue at hand. Mark had left the room to fetch some papers which he proposed to take to a very private and special corner of the study dedicated to himself, an alcove necessarily well known to Vera. She had intended to join him shortly, but in a weak moment she

had paused to glance at some pathetically tame pheasants dabbling in and out amongst the laurel bushes like cocks and hens, with a touchingly foolish confidence in creation and no thought of their autumn doom, and it was then that her hostess pounced.

Vera shrugged her shoulders resignedly, but it is not easy to shrug with a determined little person hanging her full weight on to your arm, so the shrug came only on one side of Vera and she made up for these half measures by her expression.

Her prattling and innocent companion raved excitedly about the morning, the flowers, Vera's gown and her own conquests, sartorial and otherwise, for some minutes, and then came with a plunge to the reason of her attack. She said, with infinite sweetness,—

“What a dear, clever man that Mr Hading is—so brilliant. We all admire him so much. Panhard says he is the most talked-of man in town.”

Vera smiled faintly. “I don't suppose he minds,” she answered, also sweetly. “He is above talk of any kind.”

“So I should suppose,” said the other with meaning.

“Should you?” said Vera, languidly. “It is not always so with risen people, nobodies, and so on. But of course he is too noble a character to be subservient to a common origin, isn't he? It is only the butterflies of life who are ashamed of quite impossible



ancestors. Of course, poor things, such impossible forbears do rob them of a little of their glitter."

Mrs Pan set her small teeth at this rank impertinence, but smiled over the clenched pearly row quite fascinatingly. "Yes, but perhaps such nobility is a misfortune. He is, in fact, such a noble character that he does not even recognise traps when they are laid for him," was her reply. "Those dear, good, innocent persons who come to reform London are so often taken in by the designs of adventuresses in a most wonderful way. Isn't it so? Society teems with such creatures, as you and I know, dear. More's the pity."

"Have you constituted your little self his mother, dear?" asked Vera. "You are rather young to do that—you and he are contemporaries, surely? He tells me he is forty-two. Still, in experience you are undoubtedly his elder."

Mrs Pan smiled as hyenas smile and rattled all her little "dangles," with which she was covered as in a sort of jingling armour.

"Poor Mr Hading does not need a mother's care," she replied amiably. "His wife and he are simply *devoted* to one another. They say he quite worships her. He finds other women passing amusements—he told me so himself. But he absolutely adores his wife, who is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, in the intellectual and *spirituelle* style." (Vera's pose was spirituality.) "She makes all other women

of that type look old, and painted, and bolstered up by comparison."

"I have never seen him find amusement in other women," said Vera.

"No, *you* wouldn't," said Mrs Pan.

"Naturally, as I only see his best and noblest ambitions. He keeps his folly for fools, doubtless."

"Yes, of course. He has to. And even then, he says, they take him seriously and think he has a *grande passion* for them, when after all he is only sneering at them up his sleeve—and to his wife."

"He is welcome to his sleeve," said Vera, who, with an eye that blazed in spite of herself, had pulled her arm out of that of her loving friend on the pretext of slapping one of her hairless little dogs for running on the choicest flower-beds. "But as to his wife, as he never sees her, you see he can hardly find time to confide in her. Unless, of course, as may be the case, he finds shady personal confidences the only welcome conversation for low-born East-enders in purple." (Mrs Pan was clad in heliotrope.) "Those people never really get rid of their inherent love of murkiness, do they? After all, if you were reared in a gutter you are bound to have rather a—rather a—*garbagy* mind."

It was Mrs Pan's innings for a glare. Above all she prided herself on the "smartness" (as she called it) and "*ton*" of her rather dangerous and risky conversation, and to be

accused, after all her efforts in that direction, of a "garbagy" mind was more than she could bear.

"Certainly," she sparkled back in a sprightly manner, and rather a higher key than usual, "she must find the sins of the smart set awfully entertaining, if that is the case. What with the follies and poor, miserable cheats of the wretched crew he pretends to call his friends he must be able to keep her amused, I should think, for hours. He told me that he is carefully studying the members of the decayed aristocracy, and gleaning all the tit-bits he can about their crimes and stupidities, especially the worn-out Society woman and her crew, in order to write them up in his papers, and lecture about them to all those dreadful Socialists that he is so hand-and-glove with. There's going to be a big meeting in Trafalgar Square, where he is going to lecture about it and all that—run down the worn-out old idiot aristocracy (Oh, I beg your pardon, dear—but you know what those wicked Socialists are!) and give personal particulars of cases he has known personally. It will be most awfully exciting—we are all longing for it. Haven't you heard?"

"No," said Vera, coldly. "He doesn't mention such absurd projects to me."

"Naturally," said Mrs Pan, in a soothing voice.

"I should not listen," said Vera, airily. "I am happy to say I am the confidante of his

better aspirations—not of his sardonic moods. In the progress of his great work dear Henry and I have always been to the fore to assist with advice and counsel. Idle chatter we should not encourage.” Her tone was that of an inspiring goddess from a height.

“Ah, then evidently that is why he does not entirely confide in you,” said Mrs Pan. “Because, of course, everyone has heard of this big meeting in Trafalgar Square—everyone, I mean, except you. He is writing to his wife about it, and she is tremendously keen about the matter. They are making a regularly big thing of it between them. It will be quite the political event of the year. Such a wife as that must be a great help to a man.”

Vera was clearly growing weary of the fray. “She must,” she yawned. “So virtuous and Early Victorian of her and all that. In these days we really remark good wives, don’t we?—most of them are so notoriously the other thing. I can’t say I know another, besides Mrs Hading. In such a crowd of worn-out old pleasure-hunters as one’s feminine acquaintance, she stands out quite as a relief. One is so sick of the kittenish, skittish married woman. She has kicked so long. Her snub nose and her frizzled head and her paid paragraphs in the newspapers are so boring—so are her everlasting prize kittens, or hens, or marmosets, or whatever the creature happens to get photographed with. Flippancy done to death is as wearying as pomposity. I’m sick



of married kittens. There should be a seven-and-sixpenny licence on cats, and a lethal chamber for them in the end—only they never do end, the kind I mean. I recollect them in my childhood and they are at it still. It's rather boring.

"Come, ducky, ducky, ducky, dilly darling and get his din-din-din!" she suddenly cried out ecstatically to one of her hideous dogs, and picking the creature up in her arms she turned suddenly into a side door, by which they were passing, saying over her shoulder,—

"I must find my poor ickle boy boy a biscuit, whatever happens. Such a wicked world, eh, baby?" Over the dog's head she added, "You are quite mistaken, dear. There will be no Trafalgar Square meeting." So she escaped.

But she did not let the grass grow. And though Mrs Pan had to retire practically worsted, her arrows had left such a surging mass of wrath and spite in her friend's heart that even that warrior would have been satisfied with her morning's move had she but known it. And Vera did not feed her "ducky ickle" dog at all. She flung him angrily on to a sofa in her room, and practically at the head of her maid, who was at the moment stooping over it to tidy up her mistress's endless litter of novels and odd finery with which the room was strewn. Curtly ordering a cutlet for the yapping creature (the hairless ones lived on cutlets) she made a violent onslaught on to her

own face and hair, gazing into the glass with angry, feverish eyes. She altered this and that decoration, she supplemented her colour, she twisted her rings, she added to her piled hair a thicker plait, all in that eager furious fashion which certainly did not add to the beauty of her reflection in the dainty mirror. "That cat!" she muttered half audibly, as she jerked about her pretty gilt and blue enamel pots and cream jars with her thin knucky fingers and restless movements.

How dare she impugn her—Vera's—power? Personal impertinences were nothing to this. How dare the woman flaunt the man's common wife in her superior eyes? How dare she quote that slum creature and her charity schemes as a reason for Mark's not having succumbed to her own fascinations? What were things coming to? Was she, the captivating, sinuous, intellectual siren with a soul, a soul that had long been common talk in the Society papers, to be taunted by Mark's supposed devotion to an ignorant, upstart, stupid, tongue-tied wife? Viola Vannerheim must be finally and entirely crushed for daring to suggest such a thing.

What was that meeting she had mentioned? Of course she, Vera, did not know beforehand all of Mark's political engagements—it was not likely. The very airiness of her sympathy scorned mere dates and definite business plans as being beneath its crystalline soul-sympathy altogether.

But anything so obviously public as an affair

in Trafalgar Square was something about which she ought to be informed, she argued to herself. Could it be possible that Mark's absurd creature of a wife was really assisting him in some such matter, or that her ridiculous seriousness and charitiness and frumpiness and all that was going to be put to account in some solemn scheme to impress the British public? It was hardly to be believed. Yet, though Vera could remember times out of number when she had heard Mark pour sundry of his pettish complaints against his wife into her ear, she also remembered his tone last night in the card-room when her name had come up for bantering discussion. Could it be that in his stupid, middle-class notions of domestic honour, as she was pleased to call them, that he really retained a sort of *sub-rosa* belief in, and fidelity to, his wife? Was his ignorant and common origin going to culminate after all in a pompous *tableau* of conjugal felicity, and leave her, the great, the all-powerful, the alluring out in the cold after all, to be sneered at by such cats as Viola Vannerheim? She refused to stand it. Mark should not slip away from her carefully-woven net in this stupid fashion. She did not definitely plan any future, but she wanted him at her feet. And she wanted the world to see and observe the conquest. She already wore some trifling presents of his—soul-sympathy is by no means above jewelled charms and little glittering trifles—and she had really toiled with that French sociology to get hold of so many

telling phrases with which to work up his entire belief in her intellectual resources and powers of stateswomanship. Was some idiotic meeting about those tiresome beggars and working-men to be the means of her losing this influence, simply because she was out of the game? Was that slow, stolid Cockney wife of his, with her unmeaning gaze and shop-girl type of beauty, to gain an ascendancy over him after all simply through her interest in slums and those horrid things, when she had herself, in order to gain his devotion, given up all sorts of gaieties and pleasures to appear the sibyl-eyed goddess Mark now imagined her to be?

Was Mark going to reconsider his old impatience with the girl he had married and turn over a new marital leaf just because a few old sentimental ladies of title were making a fuss of her? Something must be done, and that quickly. But first she would see if it was so.

All these reflections had passed through her mind the while she tricked and touched up her rather vivid charms in the glass. Now she set off downstairs on a voyage of discovery, intent on finding out what she could from Mark himself. He was still in the study, in the far alcove, when she entered, but had finished his correspondence and was standing up by the table talking loudly to, or at, his host, Mr Vannerheim. That gentleman, a little fair, clean-shaven person of the build of a stage publican, was staring back at his vociferous



guest with about as blank and vacant an expression as anything not professedly carved out of wood and painted red could hope to look. His very wide-apart goggle eyes were fixed on Mark's determined face with a bewilderment as undisguised as it was flattering to Mark. Later on Mr Vannerheim would go away and say to his friends, "By Jove, that's a clever chap. He can talk, by Jove! He fairly puzzled me once or twice. He's real deep, he is."

When Vera entered and glided sweetly across the room, Mr Vannerheim looked, however, really relieved. The process of being puzzled by a genius is probably more pleasant in retrospective than in actual working, especially when your motor is waiting for you.

"Come in, come in, Lady Vera," he said cordially. "Just hear this statesman of ours giving me the straight tip! Here's your man for making the Empire spin, eh?"

However that might be, he made Mr Vannerheim spin, for directly Vera approached he unblushingly fled from the apartment and leapt into his waiting car, intent on a distant horse-show, his broad face complacent with honest relief at his escape.

Vera came up to the table whereon Mark's papers were scattered, making some airy remark. Vera's spirituality was never above glancing at the superscription of other people's letters, and her steely eye travelled now along the little pile of correspondence by Mark's despatch-box and papers, and read over the

names of the persons for whom they were intended, even while she uttered some sweet sentimentalism for his benefit. Yes, there it was, a letter addressed to Mrs Hading at Queen's Gate, in Mark's heavy black handwriting. So Viola was right in a way. He had been writing to his wife.

Vera sat down in the window-seat in an elegant attitude.

She began at once about the coming Labour crisis, and asked him one or two leading questions. He was ready enough to reply, Vannerheim's sudden exit having robbed him of what he in these days found a sheer necessity of his existence—a listener. She worked round very gracefully to the interest his wife took in such matters, and asked him if Clo was helping him, now that she was become such an expert at social work.

"I shall get her to assist me about my speech at the mass meeting in Trafalgar Square," he said. "I don't mean to say she can write a speech, or anything of that sort; but of course her work amongst the lower classes gives her a good all-round knowledge of data, and so on. I've just written to her about it. When I go back to town, after I have had a change up North during the vacation, I shall get her to work it all up with me. She's got a good head for remembering the ins and outs of all those people's troubles. And of course a personal touch is necessary—one must go in for the personal touch."

Vera's eyes narrowed as she listened. Then it was true that he and his wife were hand-and-glove over this affair.

"Ah, yes," she sighed softly, "that must be such a consolation to the poor, sa-a-d creatures to feel that you know them, and all that. But what will this meeting that you are all so full of lead to? What will it do? Is it not only raising their hopes only to dash them again?"

Hading looked thoughtful.

"Why, yes, in a sense," he answered. "But it is a sort of necessity. These fellows demand such a demonstration, and we, their chosen leaders, have got to appear. My name was down for it ages ago. They pin a lot of faith to me and what I can do for them."

"And do you?" asked Vera.

"Do I? I know what I can do and what I could do in the future if I set to work. It's the way you set about that sort of thing that counts—the amount of personal enthusiasm you put into it. I got very sick of their ingratitude and folly some time back, but I'm going to let bygones be bygones and have one more heave at the cart-wheel before I give the lot of them up as hopeless, as I felt very like doing a few months ago." His brow clouded. "It's been a long fight against a hideous want of appreciation on all sides. But I'm going to have another go. My wife won't let the matter rest. She goes on believing in them. I may yet pull things through a bit."

Vera's eyes were a study.

"Your energy is marvellous," she murmured very softly, "but have you never thought that—that you are giving up your best in perhaps what is the wrong way?—the wrong channel? Dear, dear friend, why not forego the unending labour-struggle and use the wonderful power of your Press influence, your writings, your papers, for the same dear, sad creatures? Would you not be doing wider good in the end?"

He looked thoughtfully out at the sky between the waving trees.

"I have had ideas that way," he said, "but it means a good bit to a man like me to relinquish a work he has once taken up. I'm not one of your triflers—not I."

"Still, why keep the shell of a belief when the soul of it has gone?" said Vera.

"Gone?" He wheeled round and stared at her blackly. "Who said it had gone? By George, you people—you are never satisfied with what a fellow does! I might slave, and toil, and work, and bear all the onus of public life till I died in the attempt, but no one would thank me. Who thanks me?—I ask you. See what I've given up, and how I've worked. Yet, I say, who thanks me?"

"I do," said Vera, very softly.

"You do?"

"I do, because you have shown me what a truly great man can be. So much so, that I now believe that you are too great for the miserable *rôle* of party politics. You are



cramped, my friend. You are tied and tethered. Rise out of it. Refuse to do it any more. Turn your brilliant talents to the larger and vaster field of your writings and Press influence. That—*that* is the way to serve the poor dear creatures best of all."

"You do not know what you are suggesting," he replied, but he appeared half inclined to listen, and they stayed for an hour talking and turning over the problems that beset him. Her periods were inspiring.

Late that afternoon Vera, strolling in the park, encountered her brother returning that way from fishing. She joined him, and lightly turned the talk to the Trafalgar Square meeting.

"Those wretched *canaille* are very ungrateful," she said. "I don't see, really, what poor Mr Hading can do to satisfy them. It is a mere waste of his time."

Lord Henry laughed shortly. He never took his soulful sister seriously. He knew her of old.

"Don't you bother about it, Vedi. He can see to himself. We've all got to bear ingratitude some time or another. It won't break Hading's heart, I should imagine." Vera seemed thoughtful.

"Suppose he got out of the whole thing?" she said, "what would happen to him then?"

Henry stroked his chin and looked at her.

"Is he going to?" he said.

"Oh, I am only putting a case," was her reply.

"Well, I suppose he'd survive," said her brother. "His corpse would, that is."

"His what?"

"Oh, I only spoke allegorically. I was only putting a case," he laughed.

"But it would not destroy his chances—his ambitions, would it?"

"Well, it depends what his ambitions are—whether he wants to become—a newspaper paragraph or a poem," said Henry.

Vera shook herself angrily.

"I know you think you're mystic," she answered. "But it's very easy to talk in that way and think it's deep."

But Henry only laughed and went on his way.

"Nevertheless," said Vera to herself, "that woman shall not triumph. There will be no Trafalgar Square meeting—for Mark. I will show them what I can do with him. They shall see *my* influence—what *I* can do. How *I*, and not his wife, can sway his destiny!"

If she had been of common birth she would have added "So there!" She had a "so there" look on her pinched and hard little face. She was standing by the trout stream that ran through the park at the foot of a lovely wooded hill, where Henry had left her. She was gazing unseeingly into the water as she did so, with her face set in the thin absorption of a mean and selfish purpose. All nature is altruistic. The stream, silvery, lapping and cool, fed the water-plants and stately reared

loosestrife, like a city of purple church spires, and gave them life and blessing. The loosestrife city gave harbour to myriad water insects. The insects cleared the water's smooth surface and robbed it of its foul secretions. A little cheery business of give-and-take went on amongst all these things and creatures, and made them hum and sing together tenderly. Only the human creature standing there was cursed, and self-murdered by self.

A toad, climbing out of the water sedges, set to work to pass her, placing his laborious silky legs carefully in the deep, cool grasses, so as not to attract her attention. He raised to her a soft agate-coloured eye by way of caution, and betook his wet pied body and grand peaceful face into the shade of his home rushes. He was after his own small business, or keen to join his soft and slimy family in their dripping nest. Could a photographer have taken a snap-shot then at his calm, goldy-green eyes, and another at Vera's steely orbs with their mean glitter, the toad would have come off best in beauty of expression. He at least meant no harm. She fed on it.

## CHAPTER XIX

THAT year the autumn brought to London, at anyrate, grey and cloudy skies, prolonged and unnatural heat, south-west or west winds, and a muggy, fever-haunted atmosphere. In these miasmatic conditions the germs of disease, always lurking in the crowded houses of the wretched poor, took fresh life and strength, and a series of epidemics attacked the more squalid corners of the great city. Added to this, trade was as bad as could be, and the want of work amongst even the labouring classes honestly willing to labour was appalling.

The Liberal Government had proved an expensive toy, and at best but a poor substitute for that manned mainly by Crawshay's cousins. These gentlemen, at least, had made fewer promises and had not at all posed as hoping to right the world. They had run their Government on the simple lines that this is a very shaky world, but by a gentlemanly air of indifference you may at least save it from going bankrupt. The Liberals had, however, signalised their return to power by a series of violent quarrels amongst themselves, by petty wars and wearing European squabbles ; and, through the want of a real leader, had turned the affairs of the nation into a sort of bear garden of greedy, dancing lunatics.



Grandiloquent promises, always impossible of execution, which they had made had come to nothing. The man-in-the-street wished to know why. That personage, having at all times no gleam of imagination, failed to see that no human agency (and this Government was naïvely human) could possibly have brought such things to pass in any case, and flew at its unfortunate representatives with the growling of a tiger—a growl threatening to develop into a roar if something were not done, and done soon.

A man of their party, who could have seen even a little way out of the tangle, would have been invaluable at such a time. The task required dauntless courage and deep sympathy. Tiresome, rude, ignorant, selfish and hopelessly stupid as the working-man often was, he was also miserably housed, miserably sweated, hungry and desperate. His dirty little children suffered just as much as they would have done had he and they been clean and virtuous. Parents who stupidly expect to be “kep” by the parish or the State are certainly to blame, infinitely so; but meanwhile, from the babies’ point of view—and the babies are the coming citizens—there is hunger to face, cold, want of fires in bitter weather, sickness, stunted growth and no childhood. The parents had absurd, ignorant theories. But the babies suffered for them. The babies sat in corners of cellars and garrets, with blue fingers and pinched lips, staring out of the

gloom, shuddering with cold, and wondering, wondering why this world they had come into a few years ago existed at all. Trailing no clouds of glory, so deeply occupied were they in trying to get food and warmth into their skeleton bodies. Mockeries of babies. Caricatures of what God meant for human young ones. Cunning, hideous, filthy monkeys, puzzled, indeed, at the sea of despair in which they found themselves trying to keep somehow afloat, and worn by sharp agony to a dim realisation that nothing but defiance, savage greed, theft and lying would serve any purpose, as shipwrecked sailors cast adrift will turn by the process of a week's anguish to the horrors of cannibalism.

Clo's work had grown to huge dimensions. A certain great and childless peeress of immense wealth had entered into its aims with practical effect, and she was but one out of the many of Clo's friends who now joined her. This lady, named Jane, Countess of Highgate, had in the spring begun the building of a large hall or institute to be permanently endowed for the better carrying out of the great work, and it would shortly be ready for occupation. Clo and her committee were deep in the organising of the myriad rules and plans for this vast scheme, which was slowly, if unconsciously, growing to be the actual realisation of Mark's dream of the "Child Citizen" days. Here hundreds of children of the very poor were to be amused, instructed, fed and

assisted in every way out of school hours. Every case was rigidly inquired into before a new member was admitted by a staff of trained women, who made such inquiries part of their duty. There were many rules and regulations, but the main idea was to teach the children self-respect, Christian principles, innocent gaiety, and happy, healthy youth. Pastimes suited to physical development were carefully taught, good meals provided for those who needed them, and easy, simple lectures on child ethics given once or twice a week by those who fully understood their little listeners.

The good results were incalculable. Brighter eyes, rounder faces, happier laughter, keener interest in their studies, and love and devotion to their kind teachers were not the least of these results; and many a gutter-rat, whose future seemed clearly the prison or the grave, would evolve in such sunshine into a human being, from that to a happy, clean, human being, and from that to a thinking, God-fearing, wholesome citizen.

But though, as the winter went on and the cold weather appeared, hundreds of ragged children were thus benefited, whilst hundreds more, as out-members, were entitled to call at the club for one meal a day, there remained the vast area of London still wallowing in its misery and killing off or stunting its young ones by thousands.

At this juncture the eyes of all the poor were

directed towards one event which promised much. They were looking to the great mass meeting of the unemployed in Trafalgar Square on a certain coming Sunday, when it was hoped that some resolution could be arrived at to meet the now frightful problem of living that thousands had daily to face. Mark's name had long been down as one of the speakers, together with the names of two well-known Labour members. The chairman was a famous and humanely-hearted personage on the County Council. The attendance promised to be immense. The poor from all the worst quarters of the Metropolis had long been in preparation for it. Upon its potentialities the hopes of many almost despairing creatures were centred, and had been centred for months.

Mark, "up to his eyes," as he put it, in his newspaper affairs, nevertheless was busy collecting some data for his proposed speech on this occasion. In one of the rare intervals in his rushing career, when he saw Clo long enough to speak with her words longer than monosyllables, he asked her a few questions about Walworth affairs, and took rapid notes of her replies. Her knowledge of the area in which she worked was the more perfect because of that very "literal" quality of which he had secretly complained. Having no hysterical imaginings, she gave him pat answers like a born secretary, and materially assisted his collection of data with facts which, even baldly stated, were picturesque—as all tragedy is



picturesque. He could not have had a more effective assistant at such a time.

For weeks Clo's heart had been wrapped up in the possibilities of this meeting, and in these brief conversations she gathered a clearer idea of what Mark meant to propose as an answer to the great conundrums than her domestic, practical little notions could ever have evolved by themselves.

And as the days drew nearer to it she made every endeavour to add her meed of assistance to the already clear statement of facts with which she had supplied him, and yet forbore to allow him to feel the least annoyance by any affectionate allusion to her old friends, so eager was she for his success at the great meeting.

They had had no further discussion over the matter which had spoilt her triumph at Court, and indeed Mark appeared on his wife's horizon so rarely now that such arguments would have been impossible, even had Clo desired them.

She was a little penitent, too. She was sorry to have annoyed him by her carelessness, and now that he was so keen about the mass meeting she would do anything to please and help him.

"Perhaps," she said to herself, "I do not understand him."

Her heart was so full of the new enterprise that she was not a little amazed on the Saturday evening before the great Sunday to see Mark come hurriedly into her own private sanctum and bid her a hurried good-bye. It

was just time to dress for dinner, and moreover, two friends were expected.

"Oh! what is it?" she cried; "you surely are not going out of town, Mark?" Her eye caught the departing figure of his man hurrying downstairs with some luggage.

"I must," he answered. "It's most important business. But I shall be up in time for the meeting, no fear. I'll go straight to Charing Cross and join them in good time."

"But"—she mentioned the names of their friends—"are coming. Surely it can wait—your business—till after the meeting?"

"You must make my apologies," he called out, going downstairs. "Henley's waiting for me in his motor. He's got Vannerheim with him, too. It's really important, Clo. Why, Vannerheim can do lots for those poor dear chaps if he likes. You'll see what we're going to do amongst us."

She heard the loud snorting of a motor as the man opened the hall door, and Mark hailed by his two friends, and before she realised that she had not his address the door shut and he was gone.

Still, she thought, he will be up to-morrow; and if anything came for him no doubt he would be found at Chassingham, or, failing that, at the shooting-box of his other companion, Sir Millar Henley, a place only a few miles from Vannerheim's.

She made the best of his departure to her guests, and got through the evening cheerfully,

hoping great things for the morrow. When the Sunday morning came, a grey, misty, miserable day, she went, according to her usual custom, to church, but her mind strayed again and again to the cares of the afternoon and the great project she had at heart.

The clergyman, a thin High Churchman, preached a long monotoned sermon on the interminable comments of the Fathers upon a certain trifling matter of Church observance, took a quarter of an hour to annihilate Origen, and quoted Augustine in the obvious belief that that great humanist was at least a god—a Keble College god in an Oxford frame. Clo came away not greatly the wiser. Her heart was so full.

On her return to Queen's Gate she found Stillingfleet awaiting her with a message from Lord Henry. It was to ask whether Mr Hading would be sure to be at the meeting punctually by three o'clock. From Vade, as a philanthropist and a friend of some years' standing, this question came quite without offence.

"Yes, he will be there," said she.

"You are quite sure that he understood—he made a note of the day and hour?" Stillingfleet asked, an odd expression in his fine woman's eyes.

"Of course," she said, "he is to be at Charing Cross by the 2.30 train. He is either at Chassingham or Rocker's Hill. He went down yesterday with Sir Millar Henley and Mr Vannerheim."

"I have just motored up from Chassingham," said Stillingfleet; "Mr Hading is not there. He can hardly, I think, be at Rocker's Hill, as Sir Millar was also of the party—at the Vannerheims, I mean. I thought I heard some one say he was gone up North, and mentioning the matter to my chief he asked me to come and inquire."

"Oh! there is some mistake," she answered; "he will be there, let Lord Henry rest assured."

But when Stillingfleet had gone she began to feel really anxious. She wished she had inquired a little further as to the report he mentioned. It was odd. Without divesting herself of her hat and furs she took her lonely lunch, thinking over what she ought to do. It was not like Lord Henry to send Stillingfleet all that way for a mere notion—he was no alarmist. Little as in those days she knew of Mark's movements this secrecy at such a juncture seemed peculiar, and there was not a little air of mystery in Stillingfleet's manner now she came to think it over. What did it all mean? She must ask advice: but from whom? Then she thought of her good friend, the great peeress who had helped her in her work, and to whose kind heart these pressing matters were as dear as to her own. Lady Highgate lived within a reasonable drive from Queen's Gate. Clo did not wait for the carriage, but hailed a hansom and drove at once to that stately abode. Her



ladyship was at home, said the man, and Clo was shown up to her room.

A very tall, thin old lady rose up at Clo's entrance, out of what appeared to be a sea of wool mats and antimacassars, and met and embraced her.

"What is it?" she said; "I know there is something the matter by your face."

Clo explained roughly, saying, "What shall I do? Can I do anything?"

"You can do nothing," replied the other; "it may be a false alarm. Why should he go North? Is there any reason for him to do so?"

Clo's face went a little paler, but she made no reply. Why indeed? She put the fearful suspicion at once out of her mind, with a shudder.

"Of course he may yet be there, as he said he would," she answered. "I do not know why I bothered you, dear Lady Highgate. But our house seems lonely and my nerves get the better of me, I think, sometimes. Mr Stillingfleet's manner seemed to conceal something—but possibly I was quite mistaken."

"You have been doing too much, dear child," said Lady Highgate, who had a thin eagle face and severely dressed hair, and a cap with bows, like the pictures of Charley's Aunt, and who wore over her shoulders a magenta China silk shawl: and in spite of this looked awe-inspiring, stately and noble, and by no means a figure of fun—so far will

character go. Moreover, her stern features were softened just now with a very kind glance for her troubled friend.

"The meeting is to-day?" said this lady.

"Yes, at three o'clock," answered Clo.

"Your husband—he is to suggest a remedy?" said she.

"That was his idea," said his wife.

"Then, my dear," said Lady Highgate, "if he comes, well and good. The remedy is his. Surely he will be there, who has worked so hard for the cause. But if he does not come—I will give three thousand pounds towards a remedy of our own."

Clo burst into tears, thanking her brokenly for her goodness. Lady Highgate patted the hand she held and bade her take heart. She, too, knew the suspicion that was wearing the girl's mind out alone in the big empty house, but knowing consolation itself on such a point to be an insult she intended to divert her thoughts.

"Drive down to Charing Cross to meet him," she said, "it will cheer you up. But remember my promise."

Clo took the kindly advice, and bidding good-bye to this generous and gentle friend she got into her hansom, but told the man to call at Queen's Gate first, as there might be a message. There was—simply a telegram from Hading. Its bald lines ran as follows:—

"Sorry cannot be at meeting. Saying I'm ill.—M."

She let it fall from her helpless hand. They were right then. He was not coming. She picked it up again and looked at the address—it was the Post-Office, Renby, a little place on the Great Northern line. Then they were right—he had gone North. But the worst of all was the mean lie at the end, "Saying I'm ill." How are the mighty fallen! Contempt will help us to bear, sometimes, things which would otherwise break our hearts. A slow flush rose to this woman's face and neck as she saw as in a flashlight the depth to which Mark had fallen, and she stood a moment bathed in the shame he could not feel for himself. If angels weep they must also sometimes blush. Then a brighter light flashed into her eyes, and a braver bearing lifted her head and gave alertness to her feet. She went to Mark's study. His private desk was closed, but he had forgotten to lock it. She opened it now, ruthlessly.

Yes, there were the notes of his speech: there was his neatly-drawn-up scheme for relief. He had not meant to speak last night when he left her. The Charing Cross story was untrue: had he followed such a plan he had known he would have been without his memoranda. She had nothing more to learn. She gathered up the papers and left the room. The idol had fallen.

## CHAPTER XX

GLO did not give herself a moment to think. Returning to her hansom she told the man to drive to Walworth, but to pass through Trafalgar Square on the way. When they came to the great sloping square she found it, as she expected, already full of the most miserable, battered, dreary-looking specimens of humanity the mind can picture. Some of the poor wretches had tramped for miles in boots that hardly covered their feet, and many of them had with them miserable drabs of wives who themselves had bravely footed the long walk through slush and mist and mud, having partaken of no dinner. All hoping, hoping, hoping. All doomed to tramp home again to fireless houses with no hope.

On the temporary platform she could see the chairman, Mr Beatman, already in his place and in deep conference with several eager men. The police were busy, foreseeing further additions to the scene.

It took some time to get to Walworth, the greasy state of the roads preventing the man from driving quickly, and when she reached the little Settlement at last she found Dorcas out, having been called away to visit a dying child. She followed her to the address given by the Sister in charge, but could not, of



necessity, bring her away at once, and was obliged, after sending in a message, to wait outside the poor house in her cab, literally shaking with impatience.

When at last Dorcas came out she found a very silent, resolute edition of her friend, and Clo told her hurriedly to jump in and tell the man to drive to Trafalgar Square.

The meeting had been in full swing for some time when the cab at last drew up on the outskirts of the immense crowd. There was a sound of groaning and hissing, and a sort of long rumbling moan of discontent from time to time swayed the great neutral-tinted multitude, like the baying of a great dog in a discontented sleep. The faces of men near looked angry and disappointed, some of them set and despairing. Clo spoke to a man near her cab, asking the cause of this.

"Cause?" said he, "cause enough. God knows! I tell you, there's not a single Labour leader on that there platform this day—not one, there ain't Robinson's funk'd it—Slade, Wilson, Hading, they're all alike. But Hading's worst of all; he's done least and promised most. May he—" He uttered a curse too terrible to repeat and Clo turned away in horror.

"We're to go home," howled another man to the winds, or the mist, or any passer-by who would listen, "with no hope left. We thought somethink 'ud come of this. We're to tramp home emptier than we came. There ain't nothin' more to hope for."

And now the surging roar that had been growing in volume began to swell into an ominous sound, hoarse and discordant. The chairman was trying to speak—he at least was genuine in his efforts. Clo scribbled a few words on her visiting-card, and calling a policeman near asked him to convey it to the chairman, Mr Beatman. The man hesitated till she drew his attention to the name, saying she came from Hading. Then she saw him elbow his way through the crowd with extreme difficulty, and eventually deliver the note to the speaker. There was a pause and a few minutes' consultation.

The people observed the interruption but took the message received by the chairman to be but one more excuse that had reached him that day as the afternoon wore on. At this they set up a loud howl of derision, that went swaying and swelling over the great sea of packed miserables like the incoming of a thunderous ocean. So busy were they with this burst of baffled rage that only a few persons, and those only in the direct line, saw two women guarded by police push their way tortuously through the great multitude and climb the steps at the foot of the Nelson Monument. It was not until Clo arrived at the middle of the platform and stood there upright, with Dorcas Deane at her side, that they realised what had happened, and then they broke into a shout of half-hilarious amazement. There on the grey stone steps, in front of the

great grey pillar, flanked by the grey lions, and surrounded by thousands of ashy, dun-coloured, surging beings, in the dim, dull gleam of a December Sunday afternoon in London, stood a lady of extraordinary beauty and commanding height, obviously waiting to speak.

Clo still wore the clothes she had worn for Church in the morning, and the effect of her extreme fairness against the rich wealth of her furs and velvet garments, little suited indeed to her surroundings, gave her an almost fantastic appearance. At her side the fair-faced Mission woman in her Quaker-like uniform made a unique contrast; such a pair had probably never before stood up to face such an audience. The chairman tried to command silence, but several shouts of jeering laughter daunted him.

Clo waited. She knew, of old, what curiosity would do when politeness failed. After a few minutes the laughter subsided, save in sundry jeers hurled, not ill-naturedly, at the strange lady by a gang near the steps.

On the face of one of these Clo fixed her eyes suddenly, and as suddenly spoke out in a ringing voice.

"That will do, Jim Ball," she said, "you ought to know Mark Hading's wife better than that. Who saved your little boy?"

The very suddenness and sharpness of this attack, coming from the lips of a beautiful, girlish-looking "fine lady," had instant effect.

"Mark Hading's wife, is you?" said the

scowling villain. "So ye are, but changed wi' fat living. Where's Mark Hading?"

"I'm not changed in love of them I lived amongst," called she, over the din, falling back in her excitement into the old vernacular and some of the old twang.

"Hooray!" shouted one, and "Well said, lady," answered another. But the repeated call, "Where's Mark Hading?" was growing in power and threatening to drown her voice. But lifting up her head, and stepping a little forward, she called out in her clear, loud Cockney voice, now shrill again in its old fashion and just sufficiently tainted with the twang to command a sudden attention, "I've come here to tell you." Then getting impatient, she threw out her daintily-gloved right hand and cried, "Look here, boys, give us a chance!" (*N.B.*—She now called it "cha-a-ance.")

Anything less like the quiet, refined Clo of the last few years it was impossible to imagine. Yet there was a kind of gallant grace in the way the Cockney abandon sat on one so beautiful and stately; it was as if Juno had suddenly developed slang. Mingled with her obvious good-humour and clear unconsciousness of self it had a positive charm to that weary crowd, sick to death of abuse and disappointment.

Somehow the men felt the charm and began to listen, now pressing forward eagerly to hear her words and to see what such a woman would say.



"Brothers and sisters," she said, "I am Mark Hading's wife. Some of you know me. I was one of you. I am still. I do what I can for your children; I count them mine. I've come here to-day, not because anyone asked me to come, but because I love you and believe in you, and want to help you." (It is fearful to relate that she now said "you" something like "yer.") "Mark Hading's away from home; he cannot be with you to-day. So I have come in his place to read to you his speech containing a plan for your relief. And when I've read you that, I'll tell you of a plan of my own."

She then took out her papers and proceeded gravely to read out Mark's carefully-drawn-up scheme, in a voice high, shrill and penetrating, full of fire and emphasis, and with always that winning Cockney accent (to them), giving the words point and power over a multitude to whom it was the normal language, and who felt its kinship.

Mark's speech was long, wordy and intricate, but they gave it perfect attention. There was something absolutely compelling about that new, loud, ringing voice of Clo's, combined with her striking beauty and stately dress and bearing. As she stood there speaking, her erect head, her eyes sparkling, her breast heaving, her slightly dimpled chin thrown proudly back and an eager smile on her short-featured, queenly face, she somehow won every single heart by the very self-forgetfulness of her. They loved her. She stood for an embodiment of life and

health and brave womanliness and beauty, and these poor starved things looked upon her rapt, as we look at a sudden blaze of sunshine on a dark November day, or as wan old age gazes upon the flashing brilliance of a lovely child.

When Mark's speech drew to a close, full as it was of plans and suggestions showing time and thought, their feelings were obviously mixed. Some caught on to several of the suggestions individually and jeered openly. Others took up the thread and called out, "What does he mean by that, lady?" and "Give us the straight tip, lady; how's that going to work?" and so on. But all were clearly willing to treat her well; indeed, her presence was a novelty, and had somehow shed a benediction about the vast concourse, for it was now undoubtedly in a better humour, though remaining sardonic as to Mark's utterances.

To all these semi-sneering questions she answered sedately enough that they must make a note of their objections and call a meeting for her husband to answer them in person. She seemed to be without fear or timidity of any kind.

"And if we do," said one, "where will he be when he's wanted?" "Dancing after fine ladies," rang out another voice, meanly.

The words touched on some raw spot quite unconsciously. She blushed painfully, but held up her hand for silence.

"My patience, boys," she said, growing angry, "you give me no time to speak. I've read you

my husband's words, plans and wishes. Now you've got to hear mine—*mine*," she said, almost shouting in her determination to be heard. She stamped her foot. Her indignation had effect. If she had read out Mark's words with spirit, her own came pouring out like those of a prophetess. She told them briefly all she knew of their suffering, their discontent, their homelessness, their hopelessness. She told them all she felt when she beheld the wheels of political reform creak slowly along, and meanwhile the children dying by the wayside. She told them, in simple words (her words were always almost Biblical in their neat sparseness, and therefore singularly telling), that those who sat day after day by empty hearths, pinched with hunger, and grey with care; those who had old, diseased children, and only starvation and the grave to look to—could not wait any longer for Governments to come and go—ay, and promises to come and go, she added—could not live to wait unless something were done and done quickly. And that something should be done.

"Boys," she said in her old short, sharp, Cockney fashion, "there's one who loves you and pities you from her heart. There's one of the 'great' that you're so fond of calling names—one I've been with to-day but whose name I may not tell you—who has offered three thousand pounds of her own to give you work and food for the next fortnight. There's others who will follow her—others who will give be-

cause she leads—and I hope to find work for three months till the spring comes.” A huge shout drowned her words, a shout of honest, sudden gratitude. “Comes again,” panted Clo, trying to be heard. “Committee to be appointed by to-morrow morning.” Again shouts. “Come to me at Walworth Settlement for information to-morrow.” Again shouting. “Boys, I wish it was to-day. May God bless you!”

The mighty heart-burdened roar of gratitude drowned her words at last, and she had to sink back, with her hand clasping Dorcas’s, into the chair Mr Beatman now urged her to take, with a sudden break in her voice and tears in her eyes.

When at last the great swelling “Hurrah,” which was the poor multitude’s thanks, died down a little, the chairman held up his hand, and after a few kind words, hardly heard, announced the meeting closed. The police began to urge a quiet departure, but hope had now re-lit the grey, grim faces, and up rose that most eternal and unquenchable thing—the Cockney wit, which no misery can quite kill; that undying sense of the ludicrous that makes the Cockney so lovable in spite of all his faults. Jokes were freely bandied about, and several gangs pushed to the steps of the Monument and asked to shake hands with “the lydy.” But never for a moment did they falter in their respect. Dorcas and Clo shared the burden of this promiscuous hand-shaking till the waning light and Clo’s



now growing paleness warned the chairman to again insist on their departure. The police now sharply aiding him, this end was at last accomplished. Mr Beatman beamed on Clo when they had gone. His gratitude was almost as deep as theirs.

"You have saved us from utter despair," he said.

"Come to me early to-morrow, Mr Beatman," she said, "or stay—this evening if you can. I want your advice about my new scheme, and the committee. Of course you will join us? Lord Henry Vade will be one of us. Do come if you can."

He consented eagerly, put her in her cab, and she drove home with Dorcas. But at the door Dorcas would not come in; she insisted on returning to Walworth to her Sunday evening duties. She was so careful not to enter that she might have known Mark had virtually forbidden her the house. Perhaps she guessed.

Then Clo, bidding her good-bye, went indoors and gave a few quiet orders: went upstairs to her own room, her eyes shining like stars. Locked her door: did a very feminine thing, went and looked at herself in the glass. Took off her hat and coat, and threw herself down on her bed in a flood of passionate, hopeless tears.

## CHAPTER XXI

WHEN the papers came out the next morning, Mrs Hading's exploit was blazoned forth for all who cared to read. It caused a tremendous sensation. It was not the kind of adventure which journalists of the "dramatic episode" type were exactly likely to treat with reserve, and of its sensational character enough was made to have turned many women grey. Her very dress and complexion were described in terms worthy of a fashion book.

Crawshay, in his bachelor town house, read it, over his breakfast, and said,—

"That woman is divine!" and "Those brutes ought to be had up for libel!" in the same breath. He got up, and calling for his horse, with a profuse amount of what the footman called "lankwidge," simply tore round the Row till he was nearly blinded by a racing east wind, not staying his wild course till he had all but killed a policeman, and almost taken a flying leap over a truculent motor car.

Lady Listower, at her country place, Merehames, read it also at breakfast—(in bed, over a pink satin eider-down quilt and some cocoa, it must be admitted.)

"My *dear!*" she exclaimed aloud, though there was none by to hear, save her maid, rummaging in a distant wardrobe, "that girl!

What a thing! Well, and serves that horrible husband of hers right. The tiresome, chattering creature, with his abominable ties and bad shooting, and worse temper. I'm not sorry for him. I shall write and congratulate him. He will look small. Common person—the way he treated poor Henry over that stupid paper. The ingratitude of the monster. But this girl speaking to mobs, and all that! Well, I shouldn't wonder if other women took it up now, too—she's quite beautiful enough to make it a mode. But I pity the mobs, that's all." She turned the paper to the light. "So he's ill?" Then, quite inconsequently, "Where's Vera, by-the-bye? I haven't heard from her since she went to the Henleys—that's a week ago. Really, the way that girl treats me is shameful. Most ungrateful. I'll write her one of my worst letters. She's had too few lately. Oh!—here," she glanced down a column of social chat and her eye caught a paragraph.

"Mr and Lady Ulma Prinz are entertaining a small party at Redaway Abbey, Renby, Yorks, the seat of the Duke of Puirminster, which they have taken for the shooting season. The party comprises the following distinguished guests:—Colonel Sir Sholto Oban-Filkes, Mrs Jack Murphy-Slaughter, Lady Veronica Vade, and Mr Mark Hading, M.P."

Lady Listower's "My dear!" on reading this paragraph swelled to an actual bellow, and even

the maid, hardened to such ejaculations, came running forward at its loud tocsin summons.

"That set!" said Lady Listower—"Sholto Oban-Filkes and that unspeakable Winnie Murphy-Slaughter—Jumpie Slaughter, or whatever they call the creature. And that Mark Hading—that poor girl's awful husband. And such a hostess!—Ulma Prinz with her little red-nosed Belgian-Jew husband and her reputation. What is Vera dreaming of? Something must be done at once! This is terrible!"

Lifting up her voice, her ladyship loudly demanded to be dressed and to set about her business.

The morning paper found Lord Henry at Chassingham, where in this fine cold winter morning he was lounging in the hall before breakfast, very fresh and cool and transparent-looking after a cold bath and a morning race with some of the kennel pets. On reading the account of Clo's speech this gentleman whistled long and low. That was really all; except that he called the passing footman to bring him a time-table at once, and in an hour had dispatched himself to London.

The world in general made caustic comments, and several of the older Tory papers were rather weakly rude about "ladies" and public speaking, and women's franchise, and the usual "What are we coming to?" cry. They even brought out of the dusky corners of their imaginations, or what old Tory papers call imaginations, a familiar if tiresome old bogey,



the typical strong-minded female, and endowed Clo by inference with hobnailed boots, divided skirts, pince-nez and short hair. These shafts can be survived happily.

For the time everyone was talking of the appearance of this "charming lady" on a mass meeting platform, and she had to give her servants stern orders to refuse admittance absolutely to interviewers and journalists who besieged her for "impressions."

She was busy enough. The appointment of the committee had to be gone through like lightning to enable her to keep her promise of affording relief on the Monday after the speech. It was of necessity informal. Lady Highgate permitted her name to be used, but forbade her share in the subscription list to be publicly announced. She called her gift Clo's—she would not have it named as her own. Mr Beatman made a handsome donation, and Lord Henry, who arrived during the forenoon, another. Crawshay sent a thousand to be anonymous, and half a dozen generous women, hearing of the affair and knowing Clo and her friends, sent offerings and permitted themselves to be enrolled as members of the committee. The thing grew with extraordinary rapidity in a few hours. Vade was, by common consent, elected president, and he and Beatman, being old hands at such work, soon sketched out a plan of a relief campaign to be temporarily adhered to at anyrate; and by noon the workers at the Settlement were able to dispense food

tickets payable to the local tradesmen, and to make appointments for work at a reasonable wage for the next day, Tuesday. Of course it meant hours of hard slaving for all concerned, and Clo, Vade and one of the more energetic ladies of the committee, a Mrs Foster, at least, had no lunch or refreshment of any kind till four o'clock in the afternoon. The place was fairly besieged by the hungry crowd, well-behaved enough, it is true, but none the less pressing on that account.

Crawshay arrived at the Settlement about noon, after calling at Queen's Gate and hearing from the butler what was on foot, and his steady, practical methods of dealing with the intricate business arrangements were of the greatest assistance. When, after hours of work, the ragged numbers outside began visibly to lessen and the noise became less; when the Settlement deaconesses had ceased trotting to and fro incessantly under the guidance of Dorcas and Crawshay, who organised the actual handing out of the tickets and work coupons (no light business), and at the end of the day's work the self-appointed secretaries were busy counting up and entering the names of those enrolled for work and relief and writing in rough ledgers, the outer door was opened suddenly, the noise of a motor snorting was heard outside, and lo and behold! Hading entered the committee room. At the threshold he stood and surveyed the queer scene. In this he is perhaps to be excused.

Vade, very untidy, for him, was glancing over sheets of names written in violet pencil and observing also that it had covered his cuffs with its sticky greeny-blue signals. Some of his light hair was standing on end and he looked pale and fagged. Mrs Foster, a thin lady whom fatigue made red and shiny, leant over a desk with Beatman arguing about some entries, a chinchilla toque far back and on one side of her head. Her hands, good kind "loaf-giver," were now very dirty, and her grey dress dabbed with ink. Crawshay, looking worried, as only rather a fat man can look worried, was poring over some cheques and a bank-book, running his fingers through his red curls, and saying inarticulate things to nobody about a whisky-and-soda being about as likely a thing to be got in the moon as here, and other irrelevant remarks.

Clo, very pale and worn out, but still eager, sat in the far corner hurriedly discussing some final details with Dorcas. The floor was littered with endless bits of paper; the bare desks and forms were dirty. The high gas jets flickered in the rush of the east wind and caught the oleograph texts on the walls with sputtering shadows. Over all the place hung an atmosphere of applied charity and violet pencil, two things abhorred by Mark.

"What on earth are all you people doing?" he called out in mock playfulness and scarcely-disguised sneering. His manner was not pleasant—for a culprit.

"Waiting for a late lunch, old chap," said Crawshay, rolling up a philosophic eye but refraining to approach the fallen great one. "Whiskies-and-sodas slow in coming. What a life!"

"Ah, Hading," said Vade, with imperturbable amiability, and going on inspecting his cuffs, "you haven't read your morning paper. Otherwise you would be aware of our labours for the unpleasant dirty man to whom we are all so devoted."

Mrs Foster bowed coldly in Hading's direction, refraining to permit him her eyes. But this movement finished the chinchilla toque, already perilously disposed, and it falling off at this juncture, she forgot her hauteur in her efforts to scramble after it in the heaps of bits of paper, and to get it placed again right end foremost. Beatman alone went forward and shook hands with Hading, looking in his eyes with a stern and steely glance that belied the sociable act.

"I trust you are *recovered*?" he said pointedly. Beatman was a square-set man with a "Newgate fringe," a bushy fringe of whiskers under his clean-shaven chin. He looked at you over the top of his spectacles, very hard, in a manner reminiscent of a reformatory honorary secretary or a police-court magistrate. This was not calculated to mollify Hading.

"Recovered? Yes," he said shortly, looking round him with defiance. "I've motored



back to see to this affair of a relief scheme." He raised his voice. "Thanks, all of you, for all you've done to help my wife. I'll see to things now myself."

The moment for this bald announcement was the worst he could have chosen. And his manner of making it was worse. He stood in the middle of the littered room in his fawn motor coat, looking the picture of moneyed comfort if ill-humour. And he made one horrible little slip which revealed his past painfully—he forgot to remove his hat. Mrs Foster, in bowing to him, had unintentionally removed hers ; he had not taken the hint from that good lady.

Vade looked hard at him the while he rubbed his violet pencilled cuffs vainly with indiarubber.

"I see," he said coldly, "you will then, in that case, have to reappoint your committee. I understood that this was Mrs Hading's work—she, I believe, made the first contribution and her clever brain planned out the scheme. Up to the present it is a great success. But if Mrs Hading chooses to reorganise her plans we are all, I am sure, at her disposal. She is our leader."

The prominence he gave to Clo was the final stab for Mark, already furious with his wife.

"What's your capital?" he said.

"Five thousand, at present," said Crawshay, who was constituted banker, "if you like to call it capital. We called it charity, don't you know."

"Pooh!—I can buy that up and double it to-morrow—and will too," said Mark.

The rudeness of this arrogant offer fell like a bomb in the little band of tired workers. They were all hungry, worn out and injured: they had all given generously of time and labour and money. Mark in his hat, with his black, angry eyes, standing blustering in their midst did not cut the stately figure he intended,

Clo, who had turned paler at his entrance over in her corner, now rose up and came towards him and murmured a few polite words, hurriedly explaining the kindness of her friends and suggesting some plan of future discussion at a more reasonable season. Mark looked at her with a nasty glance as though her face roused some malignant memory.

"Thanks," he said aloud for all to hear, "I can manage my own affairs best."

Vade gave up his cuffs as a bad job. Going over to the hook on which it hung he took down his dandified and be-waisted overcoat, into which Crawshay helped him. He went to Mrs Foster and asked her, with great deference, which way she went and whether he could be of any assistance with his brougham. That lady, in a tremor of indignation at Hading, was pulling her gloves on over her now inky and dingy hands. She thanked him with a pitiful little forced smile, but said her carriage was waiting for her. She looked ready for tears—indignant tears.

So they all went, as it were dismissed, but

said good-bye to Clo very kindly. They all pitied her from their hearts—yet who could show it? She thanked them brokenly, with a little mist of tears in her eyes, standing in the litter of her great work, by the side of her husband—her great husband.

“I think we did a little good, eh, Mrs Hading?” said Vade. “You can now carry on your scheme swimmingly, I hope? I wish you every possible success. Count on me if you want me.”

Crawshay muttered something equally non-committal, and they came away together. When they had got clean out of the place and were spinning along at a good pace, Vade said,—

“Hading has somehow gone to the dogs. What is it?”

Crawshay paused. The answer, in full, might have been awkward to Vera’s brother.

“Mainly morphia,” he said.

“Good heavens!” said Lord Henry, aghast, “are you sure of that? Never!”

“I know it,” said Crawshay. “Nerves and all that, of course. It’s gone on now for some time. His friends—he’s got into a beastly set—do nothing to help him.”

Vade whistled.

“Then God help his wife,” he said.

## CHAPTER XXII

THE next day's morning papers brought another shock to one or two people, though the larger world knew too little of the matter generally to understand the bearings of an announcement which appeared not only in Hading's papers (he now owned three) but in most of the others. It was to the effect that the great Labour member, Mr Mark Hading, had started a fund to meet the pressing wants of the great mass of unemployed working men in the east and south-east of London, and had already commenced operations for relief on a large and carefully-organised scale.

He headed his list with £5000 given by himself, and notified the receipt of large sums: £3000 in the name of his wife, and £1000 in Sir Samuel Crawshay's, and so on with a string of well-known names, amongst these Mr Panhard Vannerheim, and Mr Moses Prinz. He asked for further subscriptions and held himself responsible for the issuing of careful balance-sheets of all expenditure.

The scheme took the fancy of the public by the very immensity of it. And for the next two or three days this man and his vast philanthropy were talked of on every side. All England blazoned with it. If Vade and Crawshay thought much they said little. There



are moments when one is beyond speech—except it be, as in Crawshay's case, "lank-widge."

Happily, too, Clo was a silent woman. She could have said much at this juncture had she had the power of self-expression. Failing in that constitutionally, except in very rare cases of excitement as on the memorable Sunday in Trafalgar Square, she simply withdrew into a sort of shell of frozen silence, which was, let us admit it, quite half wonder and half despair. Following this, Mark's contemptuous offer to let the committee stand as it was met with a string of negatives from the ill-treated members. They all withdrew except Crawshay, and Hading had to appoint a new set of his own, including Vannerheim and Prinz—perhaps more influential names in a moneyed sense if black sheep in a social.

Crawshay would not let his post of treasurer go easily, and Hading forbore to quarrel with a man of his influence and wealth combined with his known business ability. Vade he regarded differently. He had ill-treated Vade—repaid him for his lift in life with gross insolence and ingratitude. The sage George Herbert once said, "the offender never forgives;" that expresses Mark's attitude. Besides, just now, he did not want Vera's brother always dogging his footsteps, for reasons quite of his own. So Vade went, and Beatman (the latter in sheer righteous indignation, a sentiment Newgate fringes can express to perfection), and

Mrs Foster, and the other ladies of Clo's convening; all except one withdrew haughtily. Crawshay was tackled by those who knew something as to his adherence to such a cause.

"When I see a pack of bounders and blusterers," said he in his stolid fashion, "swaggering into the earnings of other folk's work I don't turn tail and run. I sit tight and fight 'em. They don't want me there, but there I'll stay and see things done on the square." To himself he added, whether rightly or wrongly, "That angel girl sha'n't have to apologise to *me* for being married to a brute and a bounder. I'll spare her that."

For Clo had had to write notes to all her kind supporters when the split came—the most awkward notes. To apologise for a husband who has fallen off a pedestal is not an easy matter to one so loyal as she. Vade read her pathetically loyal little letter between the lines and smiled half humorously, half sadly.

"I must readjust all my theories of human nature," he said to himself; "I once called that little woman a 'little Cockney cat.' She is, after all, a brick. Her husband is the pinch-beck."

Beatman simply snorted on receipt of his. Mrs Foster, as became a woman, had her own line. She called. During her call she hinted innumerable pitying things. Clo, at first effusively sorry for the dear woman's trouble, and sincerely grateful for her help, as the note of pity swelled, grew colder. And slowly, as

some golden sequins on a butterfly in Mrs Foster's toque began to enlarge and appear to wag against some blotting-paper coloured pink roses in the same erection—in the amazing manner that offensive people's clothes and facial faults *do* enlarge in the process of annoying one—Clo withdrew into displeased reserve. When this at last dawned on Mrs Foster she rose to go, but before she went, said,—

“Ah, dear Mrs Hading, we shall see Mr Hading's name on the list of Birthday honours yet. He is a *very* great man. He will be greater yet.”

Clo smiled distantly as she faced her visitor's malicious eyes.

“We have such different ideas of greatness, dear Mrs Foster,” she said, and had the best of it. But she felt the sting of the mean hint all the more because it rang with a possible truth.

Lady Listower, hearing things from Henry, called immediately after the sequins departed. She rustled in, corpulent and fierce-looking, and seized Clo by both hands.

“My *dear*,” she said, “all men are beasts. All the world is the same. What a life! Horrible monsters. So long as those sad creatures in the East get fed, who cares? *I* don't. It's your good work—let those dull, boring men get the glory if they like. That is their way—those ugly millionaires, like frogs, all sitting round and enjoying the praise not one of them has earned. Never mind, my soul.

You're a very pretty, sweet, clever woman, and there's another world where I am convinced original souls will be appreciated and not mixed up with Pannerheims—no, Vannerheims—isn't that the wretch's name?—and such sets. I always say that to myself when I see my complexion looking hideous. After all, we aren't known here as we ought to be—we're misunderstood." She sat down panting.

Clo was grateful to her for her tactful avoidance of allusion to Mark, in spite of the slight apparent confusion in her philosophy.

"Vera," continued the great lady, "is bothering me dreadfully. She is so mysterious. Have you seen her lately?" She said it so pointedly that Clo blushed in spite of herself.

"No," she answered, "we have not met for months."

Lady Listower looked at her under her lashes.

"Vera shall marry," she continued. "I must make her father insist on it. There is a man who has wanted her for years. Dull but rich—old—tiresome—gout in the head—dyed moustache. Still, most devoted. Good family. She is getting talked about just now—positively talked about—with whom do you think?" She paused and looked at Clo, who sat quite still and white. "Why—with Stillingfleet," she concluded triumphantly.

"Of course," went on her ladyship, "an honour for Stillingfleet and all that. But really most annoying to me. After this I shall keep



a close watch on her—no more visits to country houses under the chaperonage of shady hostesses! The idea!—and to flirt with a secretary. The woman is mad, quite mad!”

Clo recognised the kindness lying behind this tirade, and could only hold her friend's hand affectionately. This proud woman, with her haughty name and reputation for selfish exclusiveness, had never been anything but angelically kind to her. Just now she valued kindness very deeply.

As the months went on Mark's health began to give serious trouble. The healthy colour that had so aided his fine appearance in the first years of his success had now completely faded, and his features wore a loosened look as if the facial muscles had weakened. His stoutness increased but without the appearance of health, and he looked flabby and lined and dull about the eyes. “Over work,” said his friends. “Hard living,” said his enemies. “Too much success,” said the failures. “A failure,” said the successes.

In the autumn he sent in his resignation to his constituency. His doctor advised foreign travel—a motor tour across Europe. He resigned his seat on those grounds. He kept his hand in, however, with his charity scheme, and this, together with his immense newspaper labours, kept him busy. His wife helped him at the Settlement but her name did not appear in that connection so far as the great world was concerned; only the poor knew who really did

the work, and even they, being but human, acquired an instinctive respect for the man who paid the cheques. Everywhere he was lauded as the great philanthropist, England's coming man, and his wonderful if unworkable schemes for the abiding social conditions which appeared from time to time in his newspapers attracted the admiring attention of all who adore the blatantly obvious—and these are legion.

He started for his tour alone. His wife was to remain behind in charge of the slum work for a month or two, and was to join him at Dinan in the spring. That was the arrangement. His strange inertia where she was concerned had become proverbial now. She was strangely used to it, and did not question it. She had grown so self-contained owing to it (that sort of trouble seems to either eternally seal or eternally open a woman's lips), that she had not a woman friend who dare question her upon it, a wonderful state of affairs in the case of a gentle-mannered grass widow. There had been one "scene" between them over her Trafalgar Square speech, when Mark had utterly lost all control of himself. She had said little in reply beyond the words "I did it for the people's sake."

"Yes," he sneered, "you pious women always have such lofty reasons for your self-glorification. Why was Crawshay in it?"

"Why? I don't know, except that he is kind," she said wonderingly.

"Yes, very kind," said he, mockingly.

"They all were," went on Clo, sadly. "Mrs Foster was—poor thing, how she toiled! And Lord Henry and all of them. Why do you look like that? Do you doubt their motives?"

"Oh! no," he said, "I don't doubt the motives of any of your masculine friends."

But the sneer fell short, the victim being gently stupid—one of the ironies of destiny of many good sneers. There is no armour against these shafts equal to an innocent mind and a pair of soft eyes.

She was left mainly with Crawshay, so far as the work was concerned, and work now was what she lived for. She dare not think of other things. He was unfailing in his attendance at the Settlement; he was always at his post, always assiduous in his quiet way, always kind and always business-like. No one could find fault with his treatment of this lonely lady whose cause he so devoutly followed—he was a burning knight-errant with the non-compromising manners of a lift-man or a family doctor. His calm stability was his saving chance. Because of it he was trusted, confided in, made a friend of; this was joy to him, but it was a joy a little mixed with the knowledge that he counted very much as a male Dorcas in the lady's mind. You cannot have things every way.

Nevertheless, there were people who began to talk, or rather twitter, as the months went on and Hading did not return. Clo had made herself just prominent enough on that memor-

able Sunday to rank in the world's category as enough of a definite personality to attack. Her prettiness made her in any case a mark for any idle woman's ill-humour and spleen—that goes without saying. But prettiness and capacity, as she had suddenly shown on that day, combined with unimpeachable character, were things naturally to draw the spite of the under world of feminine busybodies and the hang-dog gang of feeble-witted idle men who slunk in their train and giggled weakly in their drawing-rooms. So that a mean little wind of vague gossip got up about her daily attendance at her charity work and the almost daily attendance of the treasurer, Crawshay.

And in the *salons* of other feminine philanthropists, mean-looking creatures in terrible toques or bonnets, creatures perspiring over tea and gush in a most unbecoming fashion, laid their heads together and said some things, and giggled some, and sniffed others, and coughed others; in this way the little wind of scandal grew in volume, at anyrate in those centres of charitable activity where the members met mainly to talk one another down, drink tea, and look extremely plain in very much over-bedecked costumes bought in bits at sales.

Mark, before leaving town, had worked day and night at a scheme for the colonisation of the unemployed on an immense scale, and had succeeded in drafting out in smart business form a plan built mainly on the floating ideas of deputations of socialist Utopians who had



recently waited on the Prime Minister, and respectively on all the other individuals in the State who shortly hoped to become the Prime Minister. Hading had grasped the practical possibilities of such ideas and rejected the impracticable with a stroke of almost his old genius, and had drawn up and promulgated a kind of propaganda strikingly like a solution of all the difficulties besetting the country. He had brought his ideas into practical use already as regards the men assisted by his own now celebrated Settlement, and several hundreds had already been packed off to an estate he had secured in South Africa for that purpose and for the purpose of proving an object lesson of his views to the country.

Publicly he was at the height of his fame. He was now the most talked-of man in England, and his wealth had increased enormously, whilst his three immense newspapers completed the wide circle of his power.

England had ceased to use the prefix to his name—she can do no more than that for her best. He was Hading now, pure and simple. He would live in history, then. Adding to a man's prefix is a far less signal honour than robbing him of it. To dub him "Sir" cannot approach the glory of leaving without any handle at all, or the alternative of a really insultingly familiar nickname—perhaps about the highest honour of all. To be called "Pam," or "Dizzy," or "Joe" in the street means true glory.

But Hading was certain for his place in the Birthday honours, and in order to impress the suburbs, it would be within his policy to accept the handle he was now strong enough to do without. He would condescend to a baronetcy, it was whispered by those who knew him—a knighthood he would not look at twice. He was the great saviour of a social crisis—he had stepped in when there was none to help. He was wealthy, intelligent, hard-headed, hard-tongued, and on the side of right in a sledge-hammer fashion. England adored him. What were Vade's years of quiet philanthropy to this? Nothing. This great, vulgar, pushing, selfish man, with his vast pose of philanthropy, had become the idol of his land, and the most potent influence in London, which is a yet higher thing. And he could direct and wield that influence, rushing his way across the Continent as if he were at home in Fleet Street. This is glory as we count it now. This is to be a prince.

## CHAPTER XXIII

ONE foggy evening, when a wet raw wind blew in small gusts at intervals along the pavements, themselves covered by a thin layer of drab grease hardly to be dignified by the name of mud, Mrs Hading was wending her way across the road in a desolate neighbourhood to her destination, the tram starting-place.

She had had a harder day than usual, and was tired. Her beautiful, pale face looked wan in the glare of the lamps she passed at intervals, and in spite of herself she was vaguely depressed. Work, regarded as a thing to fill one's life entirely, fails occasionally: it fails when one is physically tired. She had not heard from her husband for weeks, and she was suffering now from one of those attacks of self-questioning which she had become a prey to of late. The thought had come to her once or twice—was she too solemn? Had her interest in the poor been so great that she had overlooked her duty of being interested in her husband's pastimes? Yet it was he who first taught her her present enthusiasm. He had changed and she had not followed him. To-night she blamed herself.

At this juncture she was encountered by a woman who motioned to speak to her. Clo had sent her carriage home two hours before,

as it had been a long day and promised to be longer. The want and misery were very great, and being only a rather slow, painstaking woman, without the genius of the reforming organiser, she had stuck to her post with her faithful women workers until long after the ordinary time to go back to the lonely place she called home. Now, on this dreary, muddy winter's evening, she wrapped her cloak closely round her and made for the tram terminus as naturally as she would have done in the old days when carriages and motors had not even entered her dreams. She was painfully irclaimable in such ways as these. She could never rise with her husband. They had been right, those bygone prophetic croakers; she would be a drag on his career. To-night she thought she was.

By a common jeweller's window, wherein pinchbeck rings, "alberts," chains and watches were advertised loudly, not only by cards with red lettering, but by the shouts of a small and greasy gentleman of the Jewish persuasion wearing a large nosegay of artificial pink flowers in the buttonhole of his sagging grey tail coat, stood a lady, apparently studying the glories within. She was a medium-sized, square woman, with her elbows fixed against her hips and her hands joining exactly in the middle of the front of her waist, and holding a reticule. She wore a spotted veil tightly pulled over her face, and a small toque. In that flaring inferno of vulgarity she looked very ladylike. Lady-



like—the awful phrase occurred even to Clo as her abstracted glance caught the stranger's. Who was she? The whole thing was vaguely familiar.

"Mrs Hading," said the stranger, approaching, "may I speak with you for a moment?" She coughed. "My name is Mrs Stillingfleet."

"Of course," said Clo, "I recollect you, Mrs Stillingfleet. I have met your husband once or twice. Can I do anything?"

"It was only a word I wanted," said Mrs Stillingfleet; "I did not like to call. I have my reasons for not attracting any attention to my movements, for the sake of others—for your own sake as well as another's." Her manner was infinitely mysterious. Clo grew a little chillier.

"What is it?" she said, in something of her old quick tone.

"It is about Mr Hading," answered the other in a half whisper, most irritating to the nerves. "You are now a great lady, Mrs Hading. You move in the highest circles of the *crème-de-la-crème*. You know all the best people. Your friends are carriage people, and so on. You created a sensation at the Drawing-Room. You are a beautiful woman, a talented one, and are the talk of everybody. You—"

"I beg you not to talk nonsense," said Clo, goaded into wrath by the string of hideously ill-expressed snobberies. "What is it all about?"

The howls of the touting Jew by the pinch-

beck shop door redoubled at the sight of Clo's rich fur-lined cloak and air of distinction, or difference, from her surroundings, now surged in upon their discourse.

"Finest diamonds—Ophir ant Golconda—eighteen carat goldt rings for three-an-six—three-an-six. Laties and shentlemen," said the Israelite in a passion of reproach, spreading out his dirty hands and leering at the crowd, "what more can you arsk. Ve *gif* our tings away!"

The lady-like Mrs Stillingfleet coughed again with pursed-up lips.

"I come to the point," she said; "it is this—a warning to you that you be more careful as to your dealings with Sir Samuel Crawshay. You are being watched."

Clo's face went white with anger.

"What are you talking about?" she said half inaudibly. "I do not understand you."

She was moving away in a fury of blind indignation when Mrs Stillingfleet caught her arm.

"Mrs Hading," she said, "I beg you will hear me. My intentions are of the best. There is a woman behind all this—a woman who is eagerly seeking your destruction. She is my own enemy too. I warn you against her. Her name is Lady Veronica Vade." She said the name in a whisper. Melodramatic as were her utterances and manner, there was an earnestness in her voice and a look of frankness in her eyes that compelled Clo, in spite of her disgust, to listen. The woman hypnotised her.

"My movements," said she, "cannot interest the lady you name. She has never been my friend. You are making some mistake, Mrs Stillingfleet." She made as if to walk away, but the woman persisted.

"Mrs Hading," she said solemnly, "I ask you to think of the past, small incidents it is true, but meaning ones. Do you recollect ever having seen my husband, Mr Stillingfleet, in that lady's society?"

"Yes," said Clo, "and why not?"

"A-h-h," replied the other, "you are very blind. So you saw nothing in that? How innocent you are—or else how little you know the lady I speak of!"

"I never gave it a thought," said Clo, coldly. "I beg you will tell me your business and conclude. I am anxious to get home."

"I will," said the lady-like person, pinching her lips. "I mention this to show you what grounds I have for making my statements. As a matter of fact I have been having my husband *and* that lady—*and* that lady," she repeated, "watched. I am weary of their indifference to me. I seek for revenge. I now find, through those who watch for me, a quite unexpected side issue. It is this—you are being watched."

"What *do* you mean?" said Clo, despairing at this tangled story.

"Have you never heard of Slater's?" said the other, ominously—"private detectives?"

"What nonsense!" said Clo. "Who would put detectives on to me?"

"Your husband," answered the woman, solemnly.

"My husband is in Italy," said Clo.

"So is that lady," said the woman, "but their agents are here."

Clo gazed at her.

"You are mad, poor woman," she said.

"No, I am sane enough, Mrs Hading. You are being watched. He is tired of you. He seeks to be rid of you—to find you out in a fault, or a seeming fault. That will do as well. Therefore have a care. He and that lady are your enemies — they seek your destruction between them. You are blameless, but there is a gentleman with whom you are too frequently seen. Beware of their machinations."

Her oracular warnings were here interrupted by the Hebraic gentleman with the button-hole who began again about the mines of Golconda and his three-and-sixpenny rings, this time at the top of his voice, a very cracked one.

In the crowd and the din and the uncertain light Clo was able to get away from her oracle and escape to the tram, and throw herself in the corner.

Just at that moment the vulgarity of the whole thing choked her as something too hopelessly nauseating to be taken seriously. The back kitchen melodrama of the whole situation, the woman's darkling looks and lurid words, her theatrical fashion of expressing herself, her low insinuations, her miserable story, combined with the surroundings of flaring shops, squalor,



and the blandishments of the pinchbeck vendor, all drew together a picture of sheer vulgarity which in itself made the whole story seem not only impossible but ludicrous.

Then she remembered Mark's unusually long silence which had troubled her of late, and all the incidents of his and Vera's acquaintanceship which had haunted her for months like a continually recurring and troubling dream. Also she remembered, as in a totally new aspect, all the little friendly attentions she had let Crawshay pay her, as not only a fellow-worker, but one who knew her whole past and had followed her husband and herself through all the stages of their upward career.

At this stage she gave herself an angry shake. What nonsense! As if poor kind Crawshay, more like a faithful, friendly dog than the hero of an intrigue, could possibly be twisted into a cause against her! As if Mark could stoop to such a cause! Even Vera, whom she knew disliked her, would hardly trouble herself so far in the name of flirtation. That uncanny woman had a mania, a craze for imagining plots—those sort of people sometimes had—and she, Clo, had been silly enough to listen, partly because she was tired and overwrought with her day's work.

She thought all this out in the tram. Alighting from it a man trod on her dress by mistake, then, as she turned quickly, gave a hurried apology and disappeared into the shadows. He looked like a foreigner and wore a dark blue coat.

Something about his appearance seemed vaguely familiar. He was evidently going her way, for as she got to the station she saw him still in her wake. Feeling worried and nervous she hailed a hansom outside the station instead of taking the train, and drove quickly home. She heard, idly, the wheels of another hansom following hers as they reached the quieter thoroughfares. When she alighted she found the man had stopped at the wrong house, but paid him and walked the few steps necessary to bring her to her own door. In doing this she observed the occupant of the other cab alight and look eagerly in her direction. As quickly, too, he turned away, but not before she noticed his face and coat under a lamp. It was the man who had trod on her dress in getting out of the tram.

She shook herself again impatiently. She was getting absolutely hysterical. But once in the house, she still felt a little uneasiness, and on reaching her room half-an-hour later to dress for dinner, she pushed the blind back very cautiously and glanced out. The same man was standing over the way in the shadow of a building, his eyes fixed upon the house. Clearly someone, for some reason, was watching her and hers. What could it mean?

That night sleep forsook her completely. Now in prayer, broken and vague, now pacing the room, she waited for the morning in a fever, a trouble and anxiety and miserable self-questioning.

To what had wealth and power brought them? Was this the end of Mark's greatness?

Oh, for the old days in the Walworth back street! Oh, for the old lost Mark who never could be again! There is nothing in the world so sad as to meet the ghosts of the living. There is no shade from the tomb equal in terror to this—the wraith of an ego that is dead, dead, in the casket that was once its temple.

## CHAPTER XXIV

IN the first shock of her discovery, Clo, who had borne so much in silence, now nearly lost her head in her grief and indignation.

To whom could she turn? Her first blind instinct was to tell Crawshay—we are so ridiculous in the childishness of sorrow. Of course the last person in the world to whom she could ever speak of such a thing. Yet Crawshay had so long now stood for protection, for strong, silent sympathy and help in her semi-consciousness, that instinctively she thought of him now for counsel. Lady Listower?—out of the question. How could she speak of the miserable affair to Vera's mother? Lord Henry, as her brother, was equally out of the question. Dorcas—the dear unworldly soul!—all she would say was, "Pray and do right." She knew the world—that world—too little to be of practical use at just such a crisis. Her counsel would be wise enough in its own true way, but there comes a time when something more than the sweetest and truest counsels is wanted; a time in our disillusion and despair when we yearn for actual human sympathy and the kindly contact of daily association with one who understands.

She could not have Dorcas to stay with her at home, she had been forbidden the house as



Clo well remembered. Even now, in such a paltry matter, she was true to her husband's wishes. To Dorcas, again, she could not go herself; she would have liked to have put up at the Settlement for a week or two in that dear woman's loving protection, but that was equally impossible. If she had enemies determined to make evil of her actions, how would her desertion of her husband's home, to the place above all others where Crawshay was entitled to spend his days—look in their evil eyes?—a place which, though home to her, was run by people in her pay and of which she was absolute mistress? Even her inexperience told her it would not do. Then an idea came to her.

There was one friend left, the friend who had helped her before, Lady Highgate. She would tell her about it at anyrate and ask her advice. But first she made sure there was no mistake about the watching. She went through another weary day, keeping her secret to herself on purpose to test the reality of this. The Settlement she avoided, but purposely went in other directions, taking cabs, trains and various vehicles, and watching to see, without appearing to do so, whether she was followed by anyone. There was no doubt that the foreign-looking man in the blue coat was keeping a most close espionage on all her goings and comings, and there was also a woman who seemed to be continually cropping up on her path. Certainly she had to admit it was no fancy but a hideous reality.

It began to get on her nerves. The man, though on one occasion last seen in Bond Street, was lounging among the trees at the far side of Regent's Park when she went round there in a hansom, looking thoughtfully into the murky oiliness of the black, wicked-looking canal. He and its sinister errand seemed part and parcel with its evil depths, as Clo grasped the picture of them under the grey wintry sky. Her whole horizon seemed to have suddenly succumbed to the lordship of fiends and creatures of untold evil. And fresh complications harassed her at every turn. What should she do about Crawshay? She could not ask him to leave the Settlement without giving the real or else some very cleverly-invented reason. He was a most difficult person to move if he thought he intended to stay anywhere—Hading himself had found that out. Yet she dare not, now her eyes were opened, risk the danger to his and her own reputation in permitting him to perform his duties there as usual, offering her his respectful kindnesses, his occasional escort, his thoughtful ministrations, innocent of the interpretation their enemies would put, had already put, on such harmless chivalrous things. Tired out, hungry, miserable (she had lunched on tea and a bun after the fashion of femininity left to itself), and beginning, at the close of the most frightful day she had ever spent, to be terrified out of her wits, she drove at last to Lady Highgate's. Regent's Park in a winter mist, and that enclosed canal, were beyond her

enduring in her present state of hunted despair.

It was about six o'clock when she reached Grosvenor Square, a miserable, damp, murky evening through which the lights flickered yellow and faint. Her ladyship was out, said the man when she knocked at the door. She said she would wait. So she sat alone in the semi-darkened room, brooding by the fire over all the blankness of the future as we do brood when we are very faint and tired. There rose before her an inevitable vision of her lost Mark—Mark who was dead—dead—though his body still lived. Mark who had fallen so low and so hopelessly. She blamed herself bitterly. Perhaps it was owing to her coldness and quietness—they were not his style, she said. He didn't like such quiet women. She took off her hat, wet with the fog of Regent's Park, to relieve the burning of her weary head. Mark had made a mistake in marrying her, she said. The tears welled to her eyes and glistened in the firelight as they fell. She had done her best, but somehow they had not pulled together; she had begun to realise that long ago, but now it haunted her like a nightmare. She had not risen with him. She could never belong to his world. It is possibly forfeiting all feminine sympathy on her behalf to say that at this juncture she did not rave or talk incoherently about the utter misery of being a woman. She hardly gave Vera a thought from the point of view of an outraged wife. She did not clutch

and unclutch her ringed white hands at all, or say scathing things in epigrammatic form. She sat rather huddled up in the big chair with the maroon fur-lined cloak wrapped round her and her fair hair disordered, gazing sadly and tearfully into the fire. The persecuted woman is the fashion, but not she who is persecuted and meek. A capacity to rant, and lovely Parisian costumes to rant in, make all the difference. This lady with the queenly face and the slum origin would never be fashionable: she was simply and naïvely miserable for the simple and naïve reason that in trying to do her duty as she saw it she had lost her husband's love. It never occurred to her to turn the situation into heroics, though there were all the materials for a melodrama to hand—detectives, cruel husband, wicked adventuress, whispering informers, etc., etc. She only wept silently like a lonely child because she had lost the love of him she served.

Old Lady Highgate, entering the room from her drive at this juncture, came blinking and fumbling forward in the flickering light, saying, "Where are you, my child? Where are you?"

Finding the sobbing figure on the chair, she just came and sat by it, patting the bowed head and murmuring those wordless things that come cooing so naturally from the lips of every woman with a mother heart. And, by-the-bye, these are not always necessarily the mothers. This one was a childless widow,



old enough to be a great-grandmother, but not lucky enough, and wearing a voluminous crêpe-covered bonnet in memory of a man who had rested under a marble sarcophagus for thirty years, and who had never loved her. That lined old hand with the large veins on it, and the big black enamel mourning ring standing out amongst the crusted diamonds flashing in the firelight, had offered comfort to many a mourner, whether of the living or the dead. She herself had had so long to mourn the living in silence, that when he died it was a kindly relief to wear the sombre insignia of a mourning which is at least respectable and capable of being shown to the world.

When Clo's sobs subsided a little and she told her broken story, the ancient lady listened and nodded, holding her hands the while, but saying very little. When the brief tale was told, she said,—

“You must come to me. You shall not go back to-night. Parkins shall fetch your maid and your things. I will not hear of a refusal.”

Also she would not hear of another word on the subject that night, and totally refused to discuss what could or could not be done about Crawshay or anybody else.

“Let the man take care of himself,” she said in her peremptory manner, “you are to have a quiet dinner and go to bed early. There is plenty of time to consider the reputation and future of this officious person—I shall call him what I like,” she added sharply, as Clo seemed

about to deprecate this sweeping condemnation. "I knew him when he squeaked with whooping-cough, and dandled him when he wore a red tartan frock and prune-coloured kid boots, and little frills. He is a most obstinate person. For the present I refuse to discuss him. Tomorrow will do for that, when you, my poor child, have had a night's rest."

So in the calm of that stern but motherly protection the weary woman gave up her cares for a while, and had a good night's rest, feeling at last the comfort of a haven for her weary little head.

## CHAPTER XXV

THE day following was bright and sunny, and Clo woke with a vague sense of relief and renewed life, unaccountable save for two things—the sun sent long shafts of warm light across her bedroom floor, and she had a warm feeling of being loved and protected.

After all she was young, and had found life very serious since success had come to her and hers. Wealth and power had taught her a sense of responsibility; what would have turned some women's heads had awakened in her a latent and undiscovered instinct of duty, and circumstances, amongst these her long-growing if vague conviction of her husband's deflection from the path he had once set himself, had combined to keep that instinct of duty so uppermost in her mind as to leave her little time for natural fun—the joy that should be a part of all youth, and without which youth insists on taking its revenge in its own tragic way.

But just as after a long-drawn shock of sorrow we wake up one fine morning with a bewildering consciousness that we have borne enough and for the moment can bear no more, so to-day she rose up with a lightness of feeling quite unaccountable save for the two facts of sunshine and friendship having suddenly flooded

into her consciousness. After all, two very blessed things, and equally from the hand of God.

She was tired with long thinking and worrying, and she did not ask herself whose friendship gave the final tinge of gold to her reflections, since it was obviously Lady Highgate's. Who else's? And as temptation does not approach the human heart labelled with large letters—in black on white with red capitals—it did not occur to connect the special ruddy glint of the sunbeams without her window-boxes with the fact that her enemies had suggested to her another love—a love she must not think about.

Of old the Evil One has exhibited many devices, but perhaps none so wary as that he brings into play when he suggests to a woman that there is a sweet and interesting thing close at hand that she may not think about. He tells her so solemnly that she may not think about it. It is his oldest trick—he played it first with Eve. He played it now, that spring morning, in Grosvenor Square. Clo, long starved and wearied out for love, went no further in her innermost speculation than the vague question—Were her enemies partly right? Was there indeed a love—wrong, of course, and out of all order and not to be thought of—laid even now at her very threshold? But the very possibility of the question made of this fair morning something indefinably, fantastically fairer. In such nebulous fashion do dreams



that may never be conceive a semi-conscious life in the heart ; and afterwards when it is all over, and we are grown logical and reminiscent, we call the thing temptation.

Clo, with her fair hair more carefully dressed than usual, looked younger and more girlish than of late as she greeted her kind protector that morning. The weeping wife of the night before was gone, and a girl like a strip of the spring sunshine flitted down to Lady Highgate's presence with a lightness which made that lady open her shrewd eyes a little wider and look twice at the visitor.

She insisted on taking her for a drive during the forenoon, and purposely went to all the well-known rendezvous of "people one knows."

"You see," she said, "your being seen with me places your enemies at such a disadvantage. Your really childish husband would look intolerably small if he were to meet us now. The world is full of most annoying men—annoying because they are so babyish in their enmities. They might do things more cleverly—less obviously. Men are so horribly obvious. Of course, that quality makes them rule the world ; but it is, nevertheless, very tiresome."

During the course of this drive they twice encountered the foreign-looking man whose espionage was becoming a shadow on Clo's path.

That afternoon Crawshay called. He asked for Mrs Hading, the servant said. Clo and Lady Highgate were seated in a small drawing-

room or ante-room, surrounded by cages of parrots, and busy over small needlework and correspondence. Half-asphyxiated dogs, almost unrecognisable as to species, wearing large coloured bows on their necks, and most of them blind in one eye, swarmed about the thick carpet, and mixed themselves up with the sprawling designs of immense cabbage roses portrayed thereon in wreaths. The *châtelaine* of this woolly Zoological Gardens sat erect and eagle-nosed as usual, appearing to rise out of the midst of her domestic gathering like the haughty Phoenix rising out of tongues of woolly flame on an insurance advertisement. Clo, looking a little paler than in the gay hours of the morning, was writing a few notes for her hostess in her large, clear hand, in obedience to that stern lady's mandate that she must have something else to think about besides her own troubles.

"Take Sir Samuel into the library," said Lady Highgate.

"Must I see him?" Clo asked, when the man had gone, startled at the thought of having to face her perplexities so soon again.

Lady Highgate looked up from her fancy work—beading a wool mat.

"Do you wish to?" she said, glancing sharply out of her stern, black eyes.

"No—indeed," said Clo, earnestly, "I cannot, cannot—"

"Then I think you had better."

"But why?"

"To bid him go—out of your life."

"I cannot see that my not wanting to see him can possibly—"

"I can. If you had said, 'Oh! I'll see him,' in your own calm, business-like way, my dear, I should have said, 'No, I wouldn't—better not. Don't give them a chance to talk.' But as you look at me with wide, startled eyes, and saying, in a broken voice, that you 'cannot, cannot,' I say you must—and say good-bye. If you have got to the 'cannot, cannot' stage, there is nothing else to be done."

Clo looked at her with wide eyes, and as she looked the warm blood rose to her cheeks and brow, suffusing her white neck and bathing her pale stillness in one rosy glow. Slowly her head drooped forward and she put up her hand to her brow, and for a minute hid her eyes.

"Never," she said, half to herself. And, "You do not understand," to Lady Highgate.

"Don't I?" said that matron, beading a violet flower on her canvas and shutting her thin lips tightly.

"Sir Samuel is so kind," said Clo; "he has been like a brother to me. I have always looked to him for guidance—lately, I mean. He is so good and so clever. It seems hard now to appear to spurn his services, and to give no reason. I hate ingratitude."

"So do I," said her ladyship, drily, "but I think gratitude is more dangerous. I think if I were you I would put it that I was going to

manage the money affairs myself in future. Say your horrible husband wishes it, if you like. Anything to get out of having Sir Samuel always in attendance. If he is not the most unutterably stupid person in the world he will take the hint and go. But I cannot answer for him—he was obstinate in red tartan. He is probably quite as tiresome now one can no longer give him a good sound whipping.”

She added, “Go, my dear,” as Clo remained perplexed. And she went.

In the library, a large gloomy room like a mortuary, furnished in the Vanbrugh style, with heavy copper chandeliers and deep crimson hangings—gone maroon with age—and what appeared to be coal-black pictures, Crawshay awaited her, standing with his back to the heavily-carved black marble mantelpiece with its grim armorial bearings. Crawshay had a baronial habit of always sticking himself with his back to a fireplace, whether it was empty or otherwise. It is a relic of an ancient notion that a man’s hearth is his castle, and in Crawshay was probably such an inborn instinct that he felt “castley” on other people’s hearths.

She came into the room noiselessly and a little timidly, pale with the thought of her ungracious duty, and troubled with all his presence called up, with the tender trouble of all these reflections in her eyes. Perhaps she had never looked so beautiful to him as at that moment.



He stepped forward eagerly to meet her, and took both her hands in his and held them for a moment, then let them drop suddenly. How could she begin to tell him all his kindness was at an end? She prepared to speak out. But what was there about his manner that struck her as something new and arrested her attention? He was usually somewhat stolid, and had a habit of looking out on the world with his rather heavy brows lowered—good-naturedly enough, but with a very heavy and self-contained effect: just the very manner that had inspired her with such confidence in him. But now there was a suppressed exaltation in his air, a quickness in his movements, a fire in his blue-grey eyes. His warm red curly hair, his brownish-red face, his vigorous, thick-set frame, were alert with a new, eager life; he seemed too vigorous and sunny to appear in place in this great solemn room dim with the dead records of the past. He looked at her with intent, smiling eyes, even a little abstracted, and altogether ecstatic. What was it?

“You have good news?” she said.

“News? Yes,” he answered shortly, smiling down upon her; “I am going away. I came to say good-bye.”

“Going away?” she said, not comprehending him.

“Yes. For two years—or more. I’m going to the Rockies—shooting,” he answered.

Suddenly she felt her world spinning round

her, and stopped a moment to think. He was going away of his own accord—the solution of the difficulty. She need not wound his kindness after all. It was all a wonderful coincidence. How glad she ought to feel. She really must feel glad—dear me, this should be a great relief. Somehow, though, it wasn't. But she must speak. He was standing smiling down upon her expectantly.

“How sudden,” she said; “isn't it?”

“Oh, no; not at all,” he answered jubilantly; “as a matter of fact, you know, I've thought of it a long time. Jolly sport and all that. I'm getting hipped for want of exercise. Besides, this beastly Government's going out shortly, and these cads of cousins of mine will get into office again—you see if they don't. I must shoot something—murder something, you know, before I can put up with that. That's why I'm going. Thought I'd run in and tell you—heard you were here. The Settlement affairs are in good order. I've seen Vannerheim, who says he can easily get another treasurer—pay some Johnny or other to do it. No more 'hons.,' he says. A bit sick of me. I did give it to 'em sometimes, didn't I? Thought I ought to come and tell you all about it.”

“Oh, yes,” said Clo, trying not to look blank; “of course. It has been so kind of you, Sir Samuel; we can never thank you for all—all you have done.”

She looked at him frankly, but dropped her eyes from the too genial glow in his.

"You're staying with Lady Highgate?" he said.

"Yes; for a time."

"I should stay on as long as she'd have me, if I were you," he said, a little earnestly for him. "It's dull for you at Queen's Gate, and she's a grand woman. The best friend and the best enemy I know. I shouldn't go back there all alone again. Shall you?"

"I must see," she answered smilingly, and trying so very hard to be glad he was really going without any explanations.

"Well, good-bye," he said, his face still flushed and boyish-looking, and holding her hand a moment.

"Good-bye—and thank you," she said.

She accompanied him to the door of the room. Beyond it lay a small ante-room, full of an overflow of books and quaint art treasures; a light little room, gay with early spring flowers in copper bowls, and full of their fragrance. Crawshay went on chattering hard as they walked slowly into this apartment on their way to the hall; he was rattling off vague things, various reasons for his departure and messages to friends. It was not like him to talk so much—he was usually so silent. He spoke of the Listowers and gave her a few messages for them.

"I tried to catch Vade," he said, "but I couldn't find him. I saw that chap of his—Stillingfleet. But I wish you'd tell Vade I hunted him all over the place in vain to say

good-bye. Queer fellow, Stillingfleet. By-the-bye, I wonder if you have ever by any chance come across his wife, Mrs Stillingfleet? But I don't suppose you have."

A sudden fear crossed Clo's mind. She looked quickly at him.

"Yes," she said, going a little paler; "I know her. Why?"

He turned to a side-table where a beautiful old bronze stood in a profusion of other exquisite antiques. He bent to examine it more closely, so that his face was turned sideways to Clo, who stood a little away by the bookcase.

"Oh, nothing," he said lightly; "rather a weird person. Couldn't make out whether she was sane or not. If she comes fussing here I should advise you not to see her." He was still examining the bronze and stooping close over the table. His always ruddy face was very flushed.

"Have you seen her—do you know her, then?" said Clo, in a low voice.

"Oh! saw her on a small matter of business, for a few minutes. Thought she was dotty. Probably she is."

"Where did you see her?"

"She came round to Norfolk Square and called on me two days ago. Rather a maniac. If she starts calling on you, Mrs Hading, you take my advice and give orders for her not to be admitted. Those wandering lunatics only badger one; and she'll bother you for nothing. Don't you see her."



He still bent and looked at the bronze, half turned away from Clo. The afternoon light shone in from the window above him, and made his ruddy curls gleam like red gold. His great strong face looked absolutely shy. The woman with her story had been to him! He knew all. And he was going away for her sake; all alone, away from all his friends. He had seen that woman, he knew the whole sordid, miserable plot; and he was doing all this for her, and fondly imagining she did not know the reason of his sacrifice. She suddenly thought of who and what they two were—a man of social power, good birth, title, wealth and ability, with all the world before him; and a slum girl, married to a man who deliberately degraded her. Her heart welled up with gratitude to this great boyish, knightly gentleman. In the rush of her grateful feeling she never remembered propriety at all; she simply knew that she could not let him go without allowing him to see at least that she understood his goodness, his chivalry.

“Sir Samuel,” she said, using his title now in a sudden overweening sense of admiration and respect, “I have seen her too. I have heard her story.”

He drew himself up sharply and looked at her intently.

“You have? By Jove!” was all he said.

Clo added, “She is not mad. What she says is true. I am followed by someone—watched. I was followed this morning.”

She could hardly speak above a whisper for shame.

"I know it is true," he said; "I made sure of that before I decided to make myself scarce. I didn't believe the woman—but I believe other facts that I have since got hold of. But never you mind. You are in safe enough hands with Lady Highgate—and with me out of the way. It will all come right in the end—depend upon it."

"Oh! it is horrible, horrible," she said, putting up her hands to her face in an access of miserable confusion. "How can I thank you? Oh! do forgive me—and my enemies," she added. She could not bring herself to say "my husband."

His eyes lighted up as they had done at her entrance. He crossed quickly to where she stood by the bookcase, a picture of shame and distress. There were tears in the eyes she could not raise to his. He made as if to take her hands, then evidently thought better of it, and stood in front of her like a private at attention with his hands hanging at either side of him, that warm glowing glance of restrained ecstasy in his grey eyes.

"There's nothing to forgive," he said, smiling down upon her, and speaking in a quick, low tone. "Do you know, I am more honoured than I can say. It's ripping—I say it's ripping, to be allowed to do something for you: to suffer for and with you. I'd go to the ends of the earth to be—to be mixed up with

you in any way. I'd rather be banished by you than crowned a king by any other woman in the world. I can't put it cleverly, but I mean it. This is better than working for you at the Settlement. It's a jolly sight better than being your secretary—I'd rather—I'd rather—why, I'd rather I was your worst enemy than your secretary—by Jove, I would! I'm proud to go away because—your dear name is at stake," he said it very reverently; "I'm honoured if I bear my share of the burden. Good-bye."

He put out his hand and grasped hers. Her tears would fall a little, though she tried to keep them back.

"Oh, my friend," she said, "how can I thank you?"

He lifted up her hand and put it to his lips and kissed it.

"God bless you," he said; and added, "Say something like that for me at nights"—and was gone.

## CHAPTER XXVI

SIR MARK HADING sat alone in the dining-room of his great country house, a place he had built himself at a fabulous cost. From the carved cedar-wood ceiling to the gaudy gold and grey and crimson walls with huge white marble pillars were overwhelming evidences of sheer wealth heaped together in positively tasteless confusion. There was no rest in the place, no peace: it said, "Money, money," unceasingly, with a hard gramophone persistency: it glittered money, it blazoned money. It made the eyes hurt and the brain reel with its vast and inartistic pretension. The table, covered with gold and exotics, glared like the vulgar parade of a seaside watering-place at the blaze of mid-noon, and almost made the eye ache with its multitudinous glories simply to look at. It made one long for a gipsy's meal out in a musk-scented field under the pale cold stars, as a kind of tonic relief from its scintillating splendour. He sat alone at the head of it all, thinking.

Sir Mark had returned in time for the Birthday honours. And he had got his baronetcy. This, with his now acknowledged rule of the Press world, wherein he was still busy acquiring and begetting, may be counted as the reaching of his ambitious summit. Millions of men envied him to-night. To millions he



was the ideal figure of success unalloyed. Power almost unaccountable was in his hands. He could reach across Continents, he could sway kings and governments : he could alter trade conditions ; he could help generously to make or mar his country. He knew it, and he thought of it to-night as he turned his little cognac glass about, round and round, by the slender stem. He knew it with bitterness unspeakable—a deep unholy bitterness. For there was even yet a limit to his powers. One thing, one paltry thing, withstood him—his wife's goodness. So it had come to this, so strangely do we work out our own destinies, that the woman whose selfish, ignorant worldliness had once threatened his future, now cursed him by her very faith to the ideals that he himself had taught her. Clo stood out, now, in his imagination, the perfected picture of what he himself had hoped to be. Clo was his early ideals personified, the self that used to be—and he hated her for it.

We must remember, however, that all pictures have varying points of view. Mark's point was clearly his own, and as clearly worthy of a hearing as Clo's, since all souls are separate and individual, and deserve their fair representation before the throne of unerring judgment.

The man looked ill. His eyes, once fiery, were a trifle bleared and drawn about the skin of the lids : his face was pale, almost to lividness, and wore the loose look of muscles which have lost their tone and the failing of some

inward zest. It was not only the vague "greying" over of his whole visage which marked the change, but even a kind of alteration in his very features. The once resolute mouth drooped at the corners, and there was that sure mark of bitter and selfish emotion, a certain contraction or screwing of the corners of the nose, those muscles which always seem to be beyond the control of the most secretive of sinners. It is one of Nature's sign-boards that never fails to make itself seen and read, even by the crowd.

A murderer who should suddenly see as in the flesh before him an image of himself as he used to be in the days of innocent boyhood, would possibly turn from the thing with real loathing. It would furiously annoy him. To this man who, it is true, had committed no foul crime save the destruction of his own higher self, the presentation, not of his past, but of himself as he had hoped to be, was a hated thing. Darkness does not love light. And he had grown to hate his wife for what she stood for.

There is one thing to be said in his exculpation, and it is a strong thing. His wife had no sense of humour. Let us recollect what this means, for it is not a little matter. If Clo could have been good with even the dimmest sense of humour, she might have retained his love and influenced him—who knows? And it is part of their tragedy that he had none either. Had one of them possessed it, things could hardly have come to this. But that is just one of the few things that birth, as we

understand the word, means to men and women. It is just one of the things which, except in a somewhat clownish form, is rarely found in slums. It is one of the gifts of the gods without which gold is as dross and uprightness strangely impotent. Clo's goodness was of that literal order. To feed a beggar, to sit up all night by the side of a sick person were to her the heights of the soul's endeavour. She could comprehend physical ills, as can so many good women, but she was incapable of understanding temptation. To her child-like mind black and white were two clearly divided things, incapable of intermingling. Life was a neatly-marked chess-board—this action or thing was wicked, that was good. It was all very comfortable and very stolid, and very, very fraught with despair for one who had tried for all that Mark had tried for.

He looked, now, over the Past. They had grown together from their life of poverty to wealth, title and power—through his talents. She had had a little intelligence—he could hardly call it talent, he said—of an imitative nature, and had risen with him. But when he had evolved—he chose to call it evolving—she had not evolved too. She had, as it were, taken up the thread of himself where he had left off, and had gone on weaving and winding quietly and silently, till now, at the end of seven short years, she was the old Mark to all intents and purposes—and what was he?

He was as good a man as his generation, he said to himself, angrily. Look at his schemes

of benevolence, look at his work, look at his influence! Everyone could not stick at that religious business for ever, he said; a man of the world had to make his way and live his life. Women, of course, did these things so naturally—took them so seriously. Clo had made herself a perfect idiot over the philanthropic craze. She was inconceivably common—she had never been able to break with the past. That was why he was angry with her, he mused—she was such a wretched reminder of his old troubles.

He had come home in the spring rather unexpectedly, instead of getting her to meet him on the Continent, as originally planned, and what had he found? Nothing that he wanted to find—nothing but that incomparable crystal wall of his wife's perfection rising up before him in its glittering immovability, that thing that had got on his nerves, that he hated as the fevered drunkard hates the mirage for ever in his path. And she had for the first time reproached him—she had told him what she knew. And his plans had stood revealed in all their hideousness. In a torrent of infuriated passion, a mixture of disappointment and a stung conscience, he had left her with a few bitter, scathing words—those fierce truths he of all people was so cruelly capable of uttering—and she had flown from him, like a creature someone wantonly strikes, with such a face as he would never be able to forget. She was with Lady Highgate now. For three weeks he had heard nothing of her or her plans. But,



hardened as he had become, he could not wholly get her face out of his mind, though he remembered it to hate it. His wretched health, shattered nerves, had driven him down here to get a day or two's breathing space and give him time to think what was to be done. This sort of thing could not go on. In his supreme lust of power, grown now to a mania, the mere thought that one weak thing stood between him and an ambition or a wish was maddening. He would make short work of this obstacle to his hopes. What was there that he could not buy? Look at his surroundings, look at his great name, look at his skill and talent—there were other things to be bought besides gold plate and marble palaces—there was men and women's testimony. Servants could be bought. He had a plan in his mind—it was growing fast. As he stared unseeingly at the gay flowers before him, still turning his glass idly in his fingers, in this his hour of utter degradation, his face sunken a little lower between his shoulders in the spell of brooding thought, he looked, without knowing it, the meanest image that a man can look. Melodrama is wrong—we are not tragically beautiful, picturesque in our villainies—we are very mean and very vulgar indeed. No hectic flush marked this man's face, and no knitting of his fine eyebrows, nor yet did a glance of diabolical cunning transform into a fine study of Evil with a capital "E." Eyebrows, eyes, brow, all seemed blurred and lost in the virility of that drawing up of the nasal muscles, that sour, thin contraction of the

mouth, as if in the indulgence of only the lower motives, the lower features alone stood out, the higher receding in power. It is the most solemn of our mysteries that man is himself both the clay and the potter.

Through the silence of the great still house there came sounds of some arrival in the hall, and the voices of women faintly heard.

Sir Mark took out his watch; it was 9.30. Who could be calling upon him at this hour? After a little delay the servant came in, closing the great doors softly after him and approaching with an air of confidential import that even his good training could not hide.

"Lady Vera Vade, sir," he half whispered, "to see you for one moment. She is staying at Chassingham, and she has motored over. I was to give you that message, sir."

"Where is she?" said Mark.

"Lady Vera is in the ante-room, sir," the man answered with deprecation in his eyelids. "Oh! and there is also a person, sir, asking to see you, but I put her off till I heard whether you would see her."

"What name?" said Mark.

"Mrs Deane is the name she gives, sir," said the man, as if there were some doubts as to its accuracy. "A nurse she seems to be," he added as Mark looked puzzled. "She says she's walked here all the way from the station—she came down from London by train—and it's a wet night, sir. I didn't like to turn her away without inquiring. It's a three-mile walk, sir, and a bad night."

Dorcas Deane? He rose and was going to send out an angry negative when a thought struck him. She might have something to communicate; at anyrate he might get something out of her. He could but try.

"Send her in here—I can spare a few minutes," he said; "tell her only a few minutes."

Now the ante-room wherein Vera had been deposited opened into the room in which Mark was sitting. The servant going to the door communicating with the hall, where Dorcas stood waiting, to give her Mark's curt message, Vera became impatient of the delay. Opening the door into the dining-room (she knew the house well), she swept into that apartment in her usual noisily imperious fashion, just as Dorcas Deane was entering by the door from the hall. Two figures moved by clock-work could not have entered from the two doors with more accurate precision. Nor could two visions of a good angel and a bad have presented a more startling contrast. Vera, languishing and tricked for conquest in a low dinner-gown of elaborate Parisian make falling round her elegant figure and sweeping far after her along the polished floor; her reddened hair, her reddened lips, her diamonds, her blandishing smile, both hands held out, saying, "Mark!" And Dorcas in her plain grey uniform, splashed here and there with the mud of her long night walk in the rain; her still and lovely face tenderly flushed with the effort, rain-drops glistening on her hair and white-rimmed bonnet,

and a light shining in her pure sweet eyes as if some vision beyond our seeing were visible to her. Instantaneously the two women stopped respectively on seeing the other, checked by a momentary emotion of surprise. Vera stood and stared with outraged hauteur expressed in every line of her angry face. For a moment, also, Dorcas gazed back at her with a look, though gentler, yet no less steady than her own. But she was the first to recover self-possession.

"Mark Hading," she said gently, "may I speak with you?"

Mark had risen and stood looking uncertainly at his two sudden visitors. Vera was concentrating all the contempt of which she was capable into her haughty stare at the Mission woman and made no motion towards her host. If it was a battle of eyes she was determined to win. But Dorcas was looking at Mark.

"Who is this person?" burst out Vera, rudely, and also insincerely, since she had recognised Dorcas at once.

"A moment," said Mark, perhaps a little stirred by some reminiscence in the sight of Dorcas after the years that had passed since their old friendship; "she wishes to see me on business. It is only for a few minutes. If you—"

"I will *not* wait," said Vera, angrily, raising her voice; "this person pushed in as I arrived and insisted on forcing her claim to see you before mine. Surely this sort of thing is very annoying? Your servants should be reprimanded. How can you allow it?"



"Madam," said Dorcas, "I ask only three minutes of his time. I have travelled far to-day: I have to get back to London to-night. I ask this favour."

"Oh!—some beggar friend of your wife's, Mark," said Vera, turning away and shrugging her white shoulders.

"Indeed, a friend of Chloris Hading," answered the woman, gravely, "also indeed a beggar—for I ask a little patience and the world has little to offer."

"Let the creature give her message in front of me, then," said Vera, in answer to Mark's glance of perplexity and appeal.

"Do you wish this, Mark?" said the woman, lifting her soft eyes to his face with a look of penetrating inquiry.

Mark gave an impatient shrug.

"Oh! go on," he said, "there can't be much mystery." And Vera laughed a short, sneering laugh, devoid of any mirth, that echoed oddly in the silence.

"Good gracious," she said, "what a fuss these people do make! Can't she have a tip and go?"

"My errand is a warning," said the other woman, standing still in the place where she had stopped on seeing Vera, but looking fixedly at Mark.

Vera, who had drawn nearer to Mark and was looking unutterable scorn, gave a peal of rude laughter.

"Say it—oh, do say it. How funny!" she sneered, hysterical with rage and spite. The woman was invulnerable, it seemed.

Dorcas looked still at Mark and seemed not to hear the interruption.

"Then, Mark Hading," she said softly, "since you wish me to speak I will speak. I have suffered in a dream concerning you. I am impelled to come to you. I am sent to tell you to change your life, to change your heart—now, before it is too late. The world has caught you in its thrall—I come to call you back to Christ."

She said the words so gently yet so solemnly that they hung on the air after they were spoken like the tolling of a bell. There was something so extraordinary in the contrast of her surroundings and herself that the attention was, in spite of itself, arrested. The rich room, the air of luxury, the rouged woman, the half-stooping man with his seared face staring at her with a gaze almost of one fascinated. Standing half the length of the long room away from them, with hands folded, the still grey figure might have been a ghost showing out pale and clear against the dark carving of the door.

"What do you say—a dream?" said Mark in a low voice.

"Yes, Mark. A dream that comes to me night by night; I cannot help myself—I am sent."

"Who sent you?" said Vera with withering sarcasm.

"Madam, the Master of us all," answered the woman.

Mark's hands grasped the back of a chair, which he now tilted in assumed carelessness.

"Oh! come, Mrs Deane," he said, trying to put a bantering tone into his voice which surprise had made rather slow in coming; "you don't tell me that you've got a divine call to come down here and reproach me for having got on and made money for myself—and position," he added, remembering his recently-acquired baronetcy.

"I come, not to remind you of what you have gained," she said slowly, "that is God's pleasure. I come to remind you of what you have lost."

"What have I lost?" he asked.

"Yourself," she answered, "your soul. You have lost Christ."

"And am I lost too?" put in Vera, tossing her chin in sneering inquiry.

"Madam, I was not sent to speak to you," answered she; "you know best what you have lost or gained. You have great beauty, wealth, title, grace; perhaps you never knew Christ. Perhaps you are one of His little ones who as yet have not seen Him. Your fault is therefore the less. He loves you as we love the erring child. But this man has left Him."

Through her rouge a flush of deep red mounted slowly to Vera's hard face. Her elaborately-dressed hair gleamed ruddy in the light. Her eyes wavered a moment.

"And what do you want?" she said curtly, surveying Dorcas with a slow, strange interest from which some of the scorn had gone.

"I have done," said Dorcas; "I came only because the message pressed upon me. Mark

Hading," she said, reverting again to him, "I beg you listen while there is yet time. Cast your sins behind you—lift up your heart—do justice once again to your wife—and begin your life over again. There is yet time. Pray to-night as you have never prayed before. I will pray with you, though far from you. To-night I will take no sleep and no rest. I will spend it on my knees for you. Remember."

She turned and glided quietly out of the room, closing the great door softly. They heard the fainter sound of the front door close after her, and her even footsteps on the soft wet gravel outside in the rainy night; the wind sighed in a gusty moan, and then silence, the silence of a desolate country-house. They heard the ticking of the clock in the hall. They almost heard their hearts.

Vera looked at her companion with a glance of mingled confusion and inquiry; Mark, still clasping the chair-back, looked on the ground. The silence was so tense that, as often in such moments, the first words spoken were trivial.

"Just fancy," said the woman. The man said nothing. Vera shook her bare shoulders as though stricken by a blast of cold, and her teeth chattered.

"Someone is walking over my grave," she said suddenly. "What an uncomfortable Methodist. I sha'n't stay now; I'll see you to-morrow, Mark, you don't look well. Go to bed early and you'll soon be all right. I'm at Chassingham—you know—I suppose? No, I've got the motor outside, thanks. Don't



trouble. Oh! yes, my cloak." He fetched her furs from the ante-room, still lost in that odd absorption, and put them over her shoulders mechanically. He seemed lost in thought; he seemed to have gone into another world.

"Ta, ta," she said; "see you to-morrow."

But the lightness had gone somewhat out of her voice in spite of herself, and "Ta, ta" said heavily is ineffective. His utter silence chilled her, and the look in his eyes was terrible. She was glad to get away. When she had gone, Mark, without uttering another word, went back to his seat by the table and leant his head heavily on his hands, staring blindly in front of him. God knows what his thoughts were. When the servants came in he told them sharply to go away—he did not want to be disturbed. No man knows or will ever know what were his reflections as he kept that lonely watch. They were grim ones, for he was still sitting so when at twelve o'clock his valet peeped in, yawning and grumbling inwardly at the delay, and still so when the same man looked in again at two.

When the long white streaks of morning fell slanting over the disordered scene the first housemaid coming to open the shutters found a little alteration in his position—his head had dropped forward amongst the glasses, that was all. Her involuntary scream brought a sleepy footman, who grew suddenly wide-awake on finding him immovable when touched, and a butler who found him dead. An hour later

the country doctor discovered, after some delay, a discoloured mark like a pin-prick on his wrist, and a small phial amongst the overthrown liqueur glasses on the table. He signed a certificate for heart failure, but he went away with "morphia" on his lips.

That same night, in London, a miserably-paid reporter on one of Sir Mark's London papers, a melancholy creature in a paper collar and a thin overcoat, was crawling his sad way home in the foggy drizzle after a long hard evening's work. He had fed mainly on buns and weak tea all day, and there was hardly so much as that at home, where a delicate wife awaited him. Out of the corner of his tired eyes he half consciously read in passing some placard whereon the name of Sir Mark Hading appeared in large letters in connection with some huge financial venture he then had in hand. The ill-paid reporter gave a sigh that was half an oath.

"Good God!" he said "what that man has and I have not! Why should he have all the happiness and such as I all the despair?"

He went home to rage against the absolute bliss of his master. And away in Sussex, in a house like a palace, a corpse lay face downwards amongst the gold plate and flowers and glasses, and a soul in utter remorse had gone to its reckoning.

Happily the Judge of men sees from heights beyond our petty notions. If God be very far away He also gets the true perspective.

## CHAPTER XXVII

THE death of the famous newspaper king caused a profound sensation all over Europe. It was said to be due to cardiac failure from over work.

A year after someone wrote a biography of this great man, with interesting allusions to his vast charities, powerful public speeches, and famous dinner-table witticisms and sarcasms, also to his great schemes as to Labour questions. His early life, which was considered rather low, was slurred gracefully over, partly in consideration for the feelings of his widow. A very fine portrait in Bartolozzi-brown appeared as a frontispiece, and the writer of the thing got some notoriety for his effort, being a rising M.P. himself.

Several hero-worshippers said that the late baronet was a grand character, and that, between ourselves, it was unfortunate that his wife had never been able to quite enter into his greatness. Other people—women—said, "What could you expect? Poor thing, she did her best, but she *was* so solemn. Dull creature. And pious. You never get those low-born women to acquire the real thing." Others—also women—said, "She bored him, you know." Others, both men and women, themselves the possessors of new titles, said,

"Oh! no, not morphia—surely you are altogether mistaken? I happen to know it was heart disease."

To Clo, in the solemnity of her grief, that awful mysterious solemnity of the physical death of those who have already died long ago, came many offers of kind sympathy from the small ring of friends she could truly call her own. But to her bewildered vision there was nothing, nothing to be said or done. He was dead, really dead now. And now, because he was dead, he had again become the old Mark of Walworth.

She shut herself in great silence; she forgot Vera and the whole sordid story; she forgot the neglect of herself, she forgot the falling away from a better hope that had blackened the last years of the erring man. She only remembered Mark, with his keen eyes and eager plans of mercy; her busy young husband, with his clever tongue, ever kind and cheery, and wearing a blue, rough suit, and laughing at her and Fortescue's attempts at gentility over his pipe by the little parlour fire. His laughter and earnestness came down the years. She forgot the financier and the baronet. Perhaps Heaven did too.

The imps from Minden Street used to come down year by year, when the first stars of Bethlehem and cuckoo pints twinkled in the lush green of the Sussex hedges, to breathe the country air. These were the sick imps,



the imps whom the doctor exonerated by certificate for a time from school-cramming and starvation. Later on, in the holiday season, the comparatively whole imps followed this batch—those who only had weak eyes or wooden legs and St Vitus's dance, that is, and so represented health. But the real invalids arrived in May. It was a sweet little village to which they came, only a short way inland from the coast, the same village at which Hading had built a country house; there was a house of mercy to receive them, a big garden, and, joy beyond all joys, a pony that looked over the hedge from a long paddock, day in and day out, with such mild-eyed pertinacity that he had become a feature in the landscape. He was a fascinating pony, dark bay colour, with a tow-coloured fringe and mane, and very fat sides. His nose was decidedly too long for him, but this gave him a most takingly wise appearance. If you whacked him with a dock leaf he started off for an apparently violent gallop round the field, but suddenly forgot in the middle, like Vera's fits of pensiveness, and came to another standstill by another hedge, still on the hunt for sugar or apples. The imps adored him. He was really the only pony in the world.

The name of the house was the Hading Children's Home. The widow of a very great man—a very good man—a man who had spent his life for the poor and poor children—had built it in memory of him, said the

village gossips. It was a low, wide building, built in a quadrangle, with a green, very cheerful of aspect, something like a pretty block of almshouses, with large, wide windows and a sort of church porch for a front door. Inside it had a playroom and clean-scrubbed floors, and rows of little white beds. There were geraniums and musks in the windows, and dimity curtains. It was intended to give holidays to such as never indulge in these, or hardly even heard of them, for such as die for want of air in cities. The imps came down to it in queer costumes—rags, finery and fancy dress of all descriptions—with queer manners and habits; but its wise rule—it was well staffed—had a wonderful way of mending the habits, and sometimes greatly improving the costumes, either by considerable additions or by the application of the wash-tub. And everybody, while staying there, wore a blue print pinafore.

This was Clo's memorial of the dead Mark, this quiet rearing of the best in the hopeless young. Persistently she had refused to lend countenance to memorials of a larger and showier nature: tablets and marble statues and church windows commemorating him in the glaring noon of his success. Following a tender feeling that had grown in her sad heart as she stood by Mark's ponderous white marble grave in the Sussex churchyard, she had commemorated only the old, dear Mark—only the Mark who had loved his fellows better than himself

—only the simple, right-loving working man, with his great, grand schemes to right his little world. And over the pretty white stone porch of the Home was a very finely-executed figure in a niche, also in pure white stone. It was the figure of a printer—a man attired in the robes and cap usually associated with Caxton—holding his printer's paraphernalia in his one hand, and leading a child by the other. The face was Mark's, the fine Dante profile shown sharp to the observer as he turned and looked down gravely and kindly into the eyes of the boy at his side. It was a very beautiful, chaste thing, unpretending in its simple expression of the dead man's best endeavour.

Beneath it were the words:—

“SIR MARK HADING,

PRINTER AND BARONET,

WHO LOVED AND WORKED FOR LITTLE CHILDREN.

*Judica me, Deus.”*

Lady Hading used to come down from her house in town occasionally and make visits of a whole month at a time to the peaceful place. After her first year's retirement the county called, or began to do so, but was gently discouraged. She had her quarters in the home, a suite of rooms full of sun and musk, but she explained that she was only there in connection with her poor children and should not visit. She sold the great mansion Mark had

built, to the scorn of certain of the neighbours, and devoted her country visits solely to her sick babies.

It was one day in May, towards the end of the month, when the time had glided by in such wise for two whole years, that she sat in the grassy garden behind the rambling house with some of her sad babies. The heat was so glowing and the light so magical that objects a little away from the children's lazy eyes appeared to quiver visibly. Even Benjamin, the youngest, a child of two, was quiet, having at last ceased to parade the garden very solemnly, attired in a washed cream flannel cape down to his feet like a priest's cope, and a red woollen brewer's cap stretched tightly over his apparently bald head, above a small white face of extremely pompous expression. One of the sleepy children had thrown a woollen doll at Benjamin quite half an hour ago in a fury of impatience; this had succeeded in upsetting the candle-extinguisher figure of that worthy full on to his face in the grass, but he had immediately recovered himself without even glancing round at his assailant, and got up and proceeded on his pompous perambulations, tightly clutching a flabby indiarubber donkey as usual.

Clo, drowsing in her seat under a big white umbrella, had reproved the mover of this attack.

"Leave him alone, dear," she said, "Benjamin will tire himself out quite soon." And sure enough he had, having suddenly tumbled



on to a rug with blue cushions and fallen into a deep sleep, with his mouth wide open and looking quite young again.

The afternoon had so drowsed its hours away that Clo herself shut her eyes and was almost beginning to dream when the voice of the head sister, a bright Scotch girl in a nurse's dress, recalled her to her senses. She heard her name called.

"What did you say, Effie?" she asked, startled out of her dreams and sitting up.

Sister Effie was coming quickly across the lawn from the porch that led to the garden from the back of the house. She looked quite excited. Her rosy face was beaming with eagerness. But who was that following her and stooping under the green trellis with its red japonica to get out of the low portico without ruffling his ruddy curls? Out of the porch he came into view. The ruddy curls caught the sunshine and gleamed like gold as he peered out across the garden in search of her face. She rose in a tremor of wild joy. He had found her out after all this time. He came swiftly across the lawn, stepping eagerly over the recumbent children, and took both her hands in his, saying simply, "Angel!"

"Only think of—of *you* coming," was all she said, but her face was like a rose.

He glanced round at the babies, all sitting and staring up at him, Benjamin very sternly, then at the far hill with the turquoise light over it.

"Is that the sea over there?" he said in a breathless kind of voice.

"Yes," she said, her hands still tight in his, "that is the sea." Their eyes met in a hush that has no name, the sweetest hush in the world.

"Come with me," he said, "come out there to the heather and the sea. I want to talk to you—my darling, my darling."

They went away out of the garden with arms locked and heads touching, his ruddy one and her fair one, through the gate into the meadow, bathed gloriously in the level golden glow that turned the world into a radiant magic garden.

They never said a word to the children, who sat in a ring—a ring of blue pinafores and mouths like O's, from the cripple child to Benjamin in the brewer's cap—staring solemnly after them as they glided away, away, heart to heart, along the meadow path, between the foamy hawthorns to the sea.

THE END







